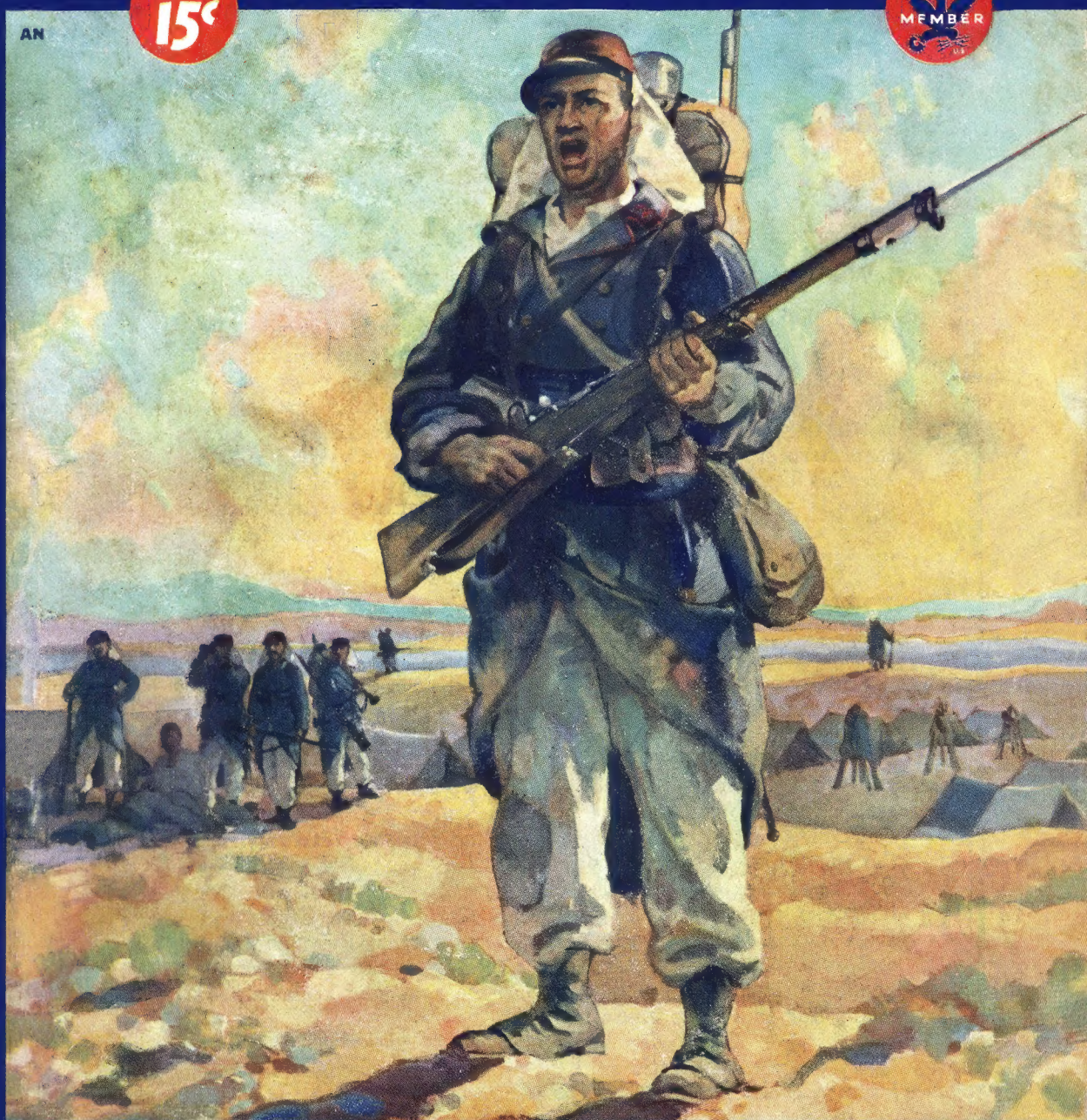


November BLUE BOOK

Magazine

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AFTER WORLDS COLLIDE

By Edwin Balmer and Philip Wylie

Percival Christopher Wren, Talbert Josselyn,
James Francis Dwyer, Frank Verney and many others
Prize Stories of Real Experience

NOVEMBER 1933

THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE



VOL. 58 No. 1

Pioneers Beyond the Sun

LIKE Alexander the Great, we have conquered the world: airplanes fly over Timbuctoo and Kamchatka, and motor-buses whirl tourists along the Santa Fe Trail; a Dakota farmer listens, after supper, to a jazz band playing in New York; and in New York a salesman talks with a customer in London or Australia. Men have stood beside the North Pole and the South; the physician looks through the fluoroscope upon his patient's digestive tract, and through his microscope upon its bacteria; through his great new telescope the astronomer maps even the mountains of Mars. And yet—

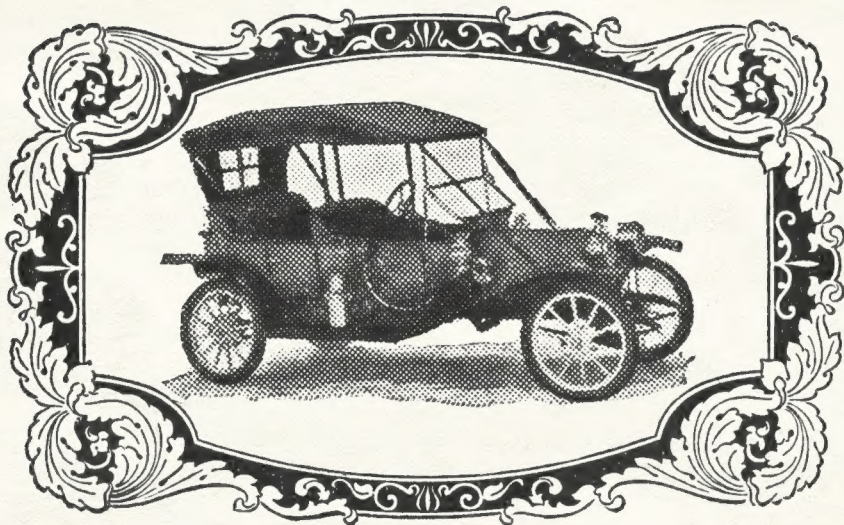
And yet most men, at times, would eagerly trade the knowledge and the comfort of this ant-hill civilization for the ignorance, the risks and the splendid adventure of our pioneer forefathers. And so like Alexander again, we long for another world to conquer. Moreover we know, as Alexander did not, that there *are* other worlds, billions of them; and it is a fair surmise that a few of these are inhabited or habitable. So there is no more fascinating field for speculation than these other worlds—worlds which some coming generation of man may indeed conquer.

EDWIN BALMER and Philip Wylie wrote for Blue Book, last year, a novel based on this alluring theme—"When Worlds Collide;" they chose their subject wisely, and they did their job well. As a result we were pretty busy writing to film companies who wanted to make a picture out of the story, and to readers who wanted a sequel at once. . . .

Well, the movie is being made, we understand; and the authors have been working hard on the sequel for our Blue Book readers. Mr. Wylie has spent the summer interviewing the most distinguished scientists of America; and with Mr. Balmer he has carefully checked over the data obtained. So in this story of the Emigrants from Earth (which begins on Page 6 of this issue), you may count upon enjoying another and even better "When Worlds Collide"—a novel brilliantly imagined, but carefully based upon the reasoned conclusions of our foremost scientific men. . . .

We are enthusiastic enough to think all the stories in this issue specially good. But there is one other to which we wish to call your particular attention—James Francis Dwyer's "The Splendid Thieves," in which the classic Greek idea of passing the torch is utilized in telling fashion. Don't miss it.

—The Editor.



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BLUE BOOK



NOVEMBER, 1933

MAGAZINE

VOL. 58, NO. 1

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What happened when oil was found in the cattle country—by the author of "Murder in the News-Room."

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Wherein a tramp steals spoons—and a sheep butts in.
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Each of five contributors had an adventure with a bear.

- The Sportsman's Scrapbook** By Ewing Walker 99
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DONALD KENNICOTT, Editor

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THE truth that is stranger than fiction; the hour so crowded with excitement that it shines bright before all others in memory—these are tremendously interesting to everyone. For this reason The Blue Book Magazine prints each month in our Real Experience Department (beginning on Page 144 of this issue) a group of true stories contributed by our readers. And for this department we are glad to receive true stories of real experience, told in about 2,000 words; and for each of the five best of these we will pay fifty dollars.

In theme the stories may deal with adventure, mystery, sport, humor,—especially humor!—war or business. Sex is barred. Manuscripts should be addressed to the Real Experience Editor, the Blue Book Magazine, 230 Park Ave., New York, N. Y. Preferably but not necessarily they should be typewritten, and should be accompanied by a stamped and self-addressed envelope for use in case the story is unavailable.

A pen name may be used if desired, but in all cases the writer's real name and permanent address should accompany the manuscript. Be sure to write your name and correct address in the upper left-hand corner of the first page of your story, and keep a copy as insurance against loss of the original; for while we handle manuscripts with great care, we cannot accept responsibility for their return. As this is a monthly contest, from one to two months may elapse before you receive a report on your story.

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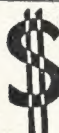
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After Worlds Collide

The deeply moving story of the survivors of Doomsday—of the few greatly daring men and women who escaped in a Space Ship before the cosmic collision that destroyed this earth, and who arrived at a hazardous haven on a strange planet beyond the sun.

ALONE in creation, so far as they knew, stood forty-four men, fifty-seven women and two children—the survivors of the end of the earth. . . .

Two worlds, you may remember—two planets came hurtling out of space. Once they had circled some distant sun which we on our earth could have seen only as a star. For uncounted ages these two worlds—these strangers from space—must have rotated around their sun as our earth and Venus and our other planets kept their appointed paths about our sun.

But far away, and millions and millions of years ago, occurred a celestial catastrophe. Probably some other star approached too close to that sun about which these planets spun. That would account for it; but whatever happened, these two stranger planets were torn away from their sun.

They drifted out into the darkness. The light and heat from their sun must have diminished until that sun dwindled to the appearance of a star; but long before that time came, there could have been no living being left upon either of those planets. All animal life must have disappeared. The seas and at last the very atmosphere—the air—froze solid. The planets were in the all but absolute cold of space between the stars.

How long they journeyed so, we do not know; we have that yet to discover; perhaps we may never estimate it; but through this cold and dark of space, they journeyed together, held to each other by gravitational attraction.

At last—and we have yet no means of knowing more than the course of the final stages of their wanderings—they approached our sun; and the sunlight, shining on them far away, made them visible worlds once more. They had stumbled into a section of the universe

where lived beings with eyes to see; more than that, they had stumbled upon the path of another planet: Our earth.

Stumbled? Many, many millions of us questioned that. They said that these strange planets had been "sent;" for night by night as they were seen to approach and grow brighter in the southern skies, astronomers studied them; and compared their calculations; and what they calculated became so alarming that they concealed their results as long as they could.

One of these planets, hurtling out of space, was sweeping toward the earth (and the moon that accompanied the earth) on an orbit that would bring about a collision. It must destroy the moon and then the earth; destroy it utterly.

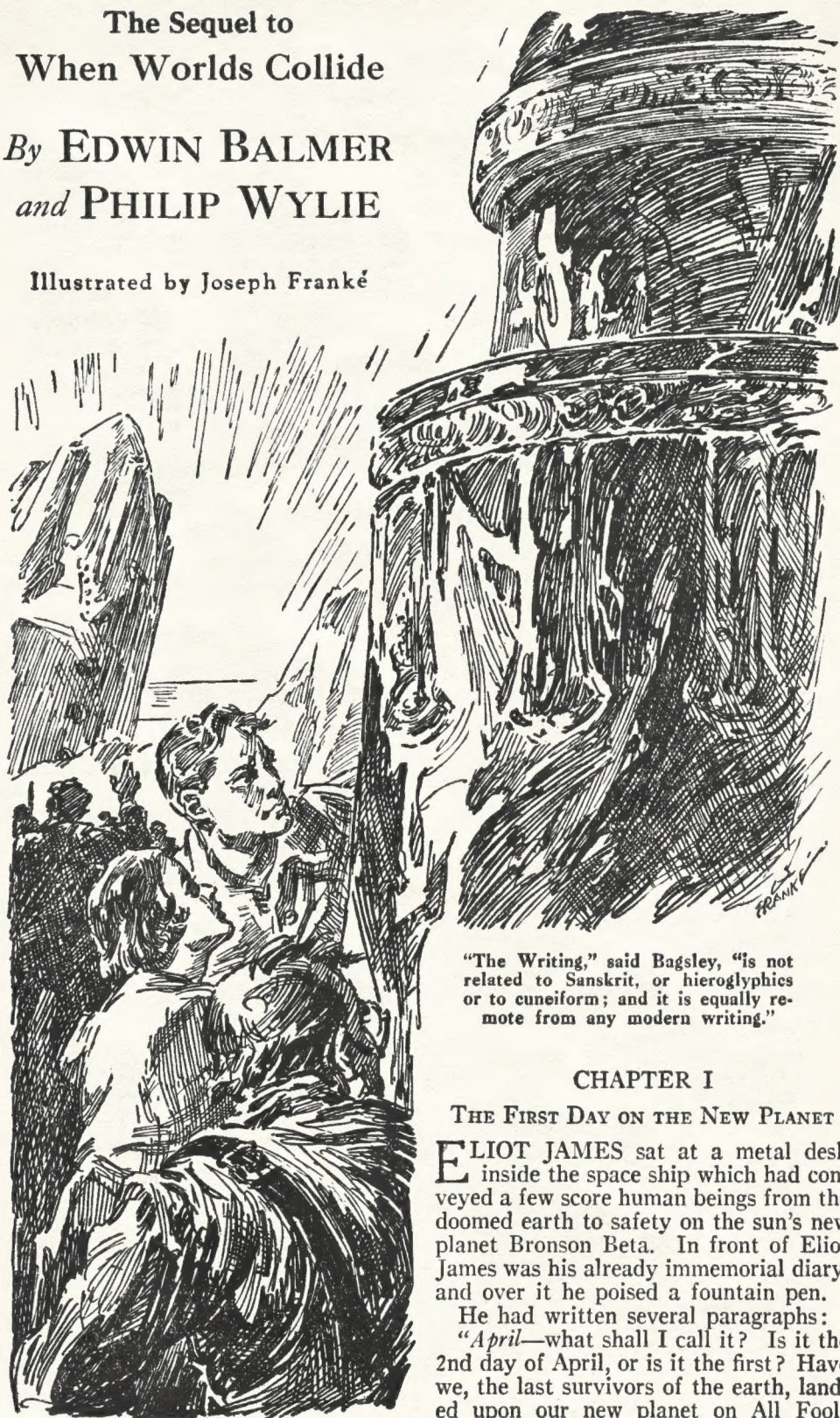
This destroying planet was the larger of the two. It resembled, when seen in the sky, our familiar planet Uranus. Its companion planet was smaller; it resembled the world in size. As it came nearer and nearer and shone in the night sky like the moon, the telescopes turned upon it found it, indeed, physically of the same order of object as the earth. Its path, while carrying it close to the world, would bear it by; it would approach but not collide with the earth; and it would make its closest approach before its huge comrade destroyed us.

So, before the cataclysm, there might be—might be—chance of escape.

How some human beings, driven by doom itself, prepared their escape from the earth, and how they accomplished it, already has been told. This is the chronicle of the first days on the new world—Bronson Beta, men called it from earth as they named the awful destroyer planet Bronson Alpha. This is the record of the emigrants from earth who reached the planet that replaced the world. . . .

The Sequel to
When Worlds Collide
By EDWIN BALMER
and PHILIP WYLIE

Illustrated by Joseph Franké



"The Writing," said Bagsley, "is not related to Sanskrit, or hieroglyphics or to cuneiform; and it is equally remote from any modern writing."

CHAPTER I

THE FIRST DAY ON THE NEW PLANET

ELIOT JAMES sat at a metal desk inside the space ship which had conveyed a few score human beings from the doomed earth to safety on the sun's new planet Bronson Beta. In front of Eliot James was his already immemorial diary, and over it he poised a fountain pen.

He had written several paragraphs:

"April—what shall I call it? Is it the 2nd day of April, or is it the first? Have we, the last survivors of the earth, landed upon our new planet on All Fools Day? That would be ironic, and yet trivial in the face of all that has hap-

pened. But as I meditate on the date, I am in doubt about how to express time in my diary.

"The earth is gone—smashed to fragments; and the companion of its destroying angel, upon which our band of one hundred and three Argonauts holds so brief and hazardous a residence, is still without names, seasons and months. But April has vanished with the earth; and for all I know, spring, winter, summer and fall may also be absent in the new world.

"I HAVE pledged myself to write in this diary every day, as Hendron assures me there will be no other record of our adventures here until we have become well enough established to permit the compilation of a formal history. And yet it is with the most profound difficulty that I compel myself to set down words on this, man's first morning in his new home.

"What shall I say?

"That question in truth must be read by the future generations as a cry at once of ecstasy and despair. Ecstasy because even while the heavens fell upon them, my companions remained firm and courageous—because in the face of earthquakes, tornadoes, bloody battles and the unimaginable holocaust of Destruction Day itself, they not only preserved whatever claims the race of man may have to majesty, but by their ingenuity they escaped from the earth to this new planet, which has invaded and attached itself to our solar system.

"And I am in despair not only because, so far as we can tell, all but one hundred and three members of the human race have perished, not only because my friends, my home, the cities that were familiar to me, the trees and flowers I knew, the rivers and the oceans, the scent of the wind and the accustomed aspects of the sky have forevermore disappeared from the universe, and not only because I am incapable of setting down the emotions to which those cosmic calamities give rise, but for another reason: as vast, as stirring, as overwhelming to the mind as those foregoing, the responsibility for half a billion years of evolution which terminated in man rests upon myself and one hundred and two others.

"They stand there in the sunshine under the strange sky on our brown earth—forty-three men, fifty-seven women, two children. They have been singing—a

medley of songs which under other circumstances might seem irrelevant. Many of them are foreigners and do not know the words, but they also sing—with tears streaming down their faces and a catch in their voices. They sang 'The Processional' and they sang 'Nearer, My God, to Thee.' After that they sang 'Hail, Hail, the Gang's All Here.' Then they sang 'The Marseillaise' with Duquesne leading—leading and bellowing the words, and weeping.

"What a spectacle! Beside it, the picture of Leif Ericsson or Columbus reaching green shores at last is dimmed to insignificance. For those ancient explorers found the path to a mere continent, while this band has blazed a trail of fire through space to a new planet.

"Cole Hendron is there, his magnificent head thrown back, and his face grave under its thatch of newly whitened hair. No doubt replicas of Hendron's head will be handed down through the ages, if ages are to follow us. His daughter Eve has been near him, and near to Tony Drake. In young Drake one sees the essence of the change which has taken place in all the members of our company. The fashionable, gay-hearted New Yorker is greatly changed. So many times in the past two years has he resigned himself to death, and so many times has he escaped from it only through courage, audacity and good fortune, that he seems superior to death. His face is no longer precisely young, and it contains, side by side, elements of the stoniest inflexibility and the most willing unselfishness. I have no doubt that if this colony survives, when the time comes to bury our leader and our hero,—the incomparable Cole Hendron,—it will be Drake who supersedes him in command. For by that day I am sure the great person in that young man will have availed itself of all our technical knowledge as a mere corollary of his remarkable character.

"AND now,"—the pen wavered,—"to what I imagine whimsically as the new future readers of my notes, I make an apology. This is our first day on Bronson Beta. My impatience has exhausted my conscience. I must lay down my pen, leave the remarkable ship wherein I write, and go out upon the face of this earth untrod by man. I can restrain myself no longer."

Eliot James stepped to the gangplank that had been laid down from the Ark.

The earth around the huge metal cylinder had been melted by the blasts of its atomic propulsion-jets. But now it was cool again. A space of two or three hundred yards lay between the Ark and the cliff which beetled over the unknown



It was dangerous work, and Tony's composure was not increased when Higgins called: "If you fall where you are now, you'll knock me off!"

pockets and his hands full of specimens of ferns and mosses which he had collected. Every few seconds his eye lighted upon a new species of vegetation, and he knelt to gather it. But his greediness resulted invariably in the spilling of specimens already collected, and the result was that he continued hopping about, dropping things and picking them up, with all the energy and disorganization of a distracted bird.

James walked down the gangplank and joined Tony, Eve and Cole Hendron.

The leader of the expedition nodded to the writer. "You certainly are a persistent fellow, James. Some day I hope to find a situation so violent and unique that it keeps you from working on your diary."

"We have been through a number of such situations," James answered.

"Nevertheless—" Hendron said. He checked himself. Several of the people on the edge of the cliff had turned toward the Ark and were marching toward him.

sea. In that space were the planetary pilgrims. They had stopped singing. Half of them stood on the top of the precipice regarding the waters that rolled in from a nameless horizon. The others were distributed over the landscape. With a smile James noted the botanist, Higgins, leaping from rock to rock, his

"Hendron!" they hailed him again. "Hendron! Cole Hendron!"

Their hysteria had not yet cleared away; they remained in the emotional excitement of the earth-cataclysm they had escaped but witnessed, and of the incomparable adventure of their flight.

"Hendron! Hendron! What do you want us now to do?" they demanded; for their discipline, too, yet clung to them—the stern, uncompromising discipline demanded of them during the preparation of the Ship of Escape, the discipline of the League of the Last Days.

Too, the amazements of this new place paralyzed them; and for that they were not to be blamed. The wonder was that they had survived, as well, the emotional shocks; so they surrounded again their leader, who throughout had seen farther ahead and more clearly than them all; and who, through Doomsday itself, had never failed them.

HENDRON stepped upon an outcrop of stone, and smiled down at them.

"I have made too many speeches," he said. "And this morning is scarcely a suitable hour for further thanksgiving. It may be proper and pleasant, later, to devote such a day as the Pilgrims, from one side of our earth to another, did; but like them, it is better to wait until we feel ourselves more securely installed. When such a time arrives, I will appoint an official day, and we shall hope to observe it each year."

He cast his eyes over the throng and continued: "I don't know at the moment how to express my thoughts. While I am not myself a believer in a personal God, it seems evident to me in this hour that there was a purpose in the invention of man. Otherwise it is difficult to understand why we were permitted to survive. Whether you as individuals consider that survival the work of a God, or merely an indication that we had reached a plane of sufficient fitness to preserve ourselves, is of small moment to me now. And since I know all of you so well, I feel it unnecessary to say that in the days ahead lies a necessity for a prodigious amount of work.

"Your tempers and intelligences will be tried sorely by the new order which must exist. Our first duty will be to provide ourselves with suitable homes, and with a source of food and clothing. Our next duty will be to arrange for the gathering of the basic materials of the technical side of our civilization-to-

be. In all your minds, I know, lies the problem of perpetuating our kind. We have, partly through accident, a larger number of women than men. I wish to discontinue the use of the word *mortality*; but what I must insist on calling our biological continuum will be the subject of a very present discussion.

"In all your minds, too, is a burning interest in the nature and features of this new planet. We have already observed through our telescopes that it once contained cities. To study those cities will be an early undertaking. While there is little hope that others who attempted the flight to this planet have escaped disaster, radio listening must be maintained. Moreover, the existence of living material on this planet gives rise to a variety of possibilities. Some of the flora which has sprung up may be poisonous, even dangerous, to human life. What forms it will take and what novelties it will produce, we must ascertain as soon as possible. I think we are safe in believing that no form of animal life can have existed here, whether benign or perilous; but we cannot ignore the possibility that the plant life may be dangerous. I will set no tasks for this day,—it shall be one of rest and rejoicing,—except that I will delegate listeners for radio messages, and cooks to prepare food for us. Tomorrow, and I use an Americanism which will become our watchword, we will all 'get busy.'"

THERE was a pause, then cheering. Cole Hendron stepped down from the stone. Eve turned to Tony and took his arm. "I am glad we don't have to work today."

"No," said Tony. "Your father knows better. He realizes that, in our reaction, we could accomplish nothing. It is the time for us to attempt to relax."

"Can you relax, Tony?"

"No," he confessed, "and I don't want even to attempt to; but neither do I want to apply myself to anything. Do you?"

Eve shook her head. "I can't. My mind flies in a thousand different directions simultaneously, it seems. Where are those cities which, from the world—our ended world, Tony—our telescopes showed us here? What remains may we find of their people? Of their goods and their gods and their machines? . . . What, when they found themselves being torn away from their sun, did they do? . . . That monument beside the

road that we found, Tony—what was it? What did it mean? . . . Then I think of myself. Am I, Tony, to have children—here?”

Tony tightened his clasp upon her arm. Through all the terrors and triumphs, through all their consternations and amazements, instincts, he found, survived. “We will not speak of such things now,” he said. “We will satisfy the more immediate needs, such as food—deviled eggs and sandwiches; and coffee! As if we were on earth, Eve. For once more we are on earth—this strange, strange earth. But we have brought our identical bodies with us.”

“SARDINES!” Duquesne said. He patted his vast expanse of abdomen—an abdomen which in his native land he had often maintained, and was frequently to assert with pride on Bronson Beta, consisted not of fat but of superior muscle. Indeed, although Duquesne was short of stature and some fifty years of age, he often demonstrated that he was possessed not only of unquenchable nervous energy, but of great physical strength and endurance. “Sardines!” He rolled his eyes at half a dozen women and several of the men who were standing near him. He took another bite of the sandwich in his hand.

Eve giggled and said privately to Tony: “All this expedition needed to make it complete was a comedian.”

Tony grinned as he too bit a crescent in a sandwich. “A comedian is a great asset, and a comedian who was able even years ago to help Einstein solve equations, is quite a considerable asset.”

“So many things like Duquesne’s arrival have happened to us,” Eve said. “Purely fortuitous accidents.”

“Not all of them good.”

“Who’s in charge of lunch?” Eve asked a moment later.

Tony chuckled. “Who but Kyto? He, and an astronomer, and a mechanical engineer, and a woman who is a plant biologist like Higgins, are all working in happy harmony. Kyto seems to understand exactly what has taken place. In fact, there are moments when I think he is a high-born person. I had a friend once who had a Japanese servant like Kyto, who after seven years of service resigned. When my friend asked him what he was going to do, the Japanese informed him that he had been offered the chair of Behavioristic Psychology at a Middle Western university. He had

been going to Columbia at night for years. Sometimes I think Kyto may be like that.”

Eve did not make any response at the moment, because Duquesne was again talking in his loud bombastic voice. He had attracted the attention of Cole Hendron and of several others, including Dr. Dodson.

Dodson’s presence on the Ark was due to the courage of a girl named Shirley Cotton. On the night of the gory raid on Hendron’s encampment, Dodson had been given up for dead by Tony. The great surgeon’s last gesture, in fact, had been to wave to Tony to carry his still living human burden to safety. However, before the Ark rose to sear and slay the savage hordes of marauders, Shirley Cotton had found the dying man.

In the space of a few moments she had put a tourniquet around his arm, partly stanching a deep abdominal wound, and dragged him to a cellar in the machine-shop, intending to hide him there. It saved both their lives, for soon afterward the whole region was deluged by the atomic blast of the Ark as it rose and methodically obliterated the attackers of the camp.

DODSON had recovered, but he had lost one arm. As Tony was Hendron’s chief in the direction of physical activities, Dodson became his creator of policies. He listened now to Duquesne.

“A picnic in the summer-time on Bronson Beta, children,” Duquesne boomed. “And it is summer-time, you know. Fortunately, but inevitably from the nature of events, still summer. My observations of the collision check quite accurately with my calculations of what would happen; and if the deductions I made from those calculations are correct, quite extraordinary things will happen.” He glanced at Hendron.

The leader of the expedition frowned faintly, as if Duquesne were going to say something he did not wish to have expressed. Then he shrugged.

“You might as well say it. You might as well tell them, I suppose. I wasn’t going to describe our calculations until they had been thoroughly checked.”

Duquesne shook his head backward and forward pontifically. “I might as well tell them, because already they are asking.” He addressed those within ear-shot. “We will have a little class in astronomy.” He put to use two resources—the smooth vertical surface of



"Around and about we will go—let us hope, forever."

a large stone, and a smaller stone which he had picked up to scratch upon the boulder.

As Duquesne began to talk, all the members of the group gathered around the flat boulder to watch and listen.

"First," he began, "I will draw the solar system as it was." He made a small circle and shaded it in. "Here, my friends, is the sun." He circumscribed it with another circle and said: "Mercury." Outside the orbit of Mercury he drew the orbits respectively of Venus, Earth and Mars. He looked at the drawing with beaming satisfaction, and then at his listeners. "So this is what we have had. This is where we have been. Now I draw the same thing without the Earth."

He repeated the diagram—this time with three concentric circles instead of four. A broad gap was left where the earth's orbit had been. Again he stepped away from the diagram and looked at it proudly. "So—Mercury we have;

Venus we have; and Mars we have. The Earth we do not have. Bear in mind, my children, that these circles I have drawn are not exactly circles. They are ellipses. But they vary only slightly from circles. Mr. Cole Hendron's associates will give you, I do not doubt, very fine maps. This rock-scratching of mine is but a child's crude diagram. I proceed. I set down next the present position of this world on which we stand—Bronson Beta."

Everyone watched intently while he drew an ellipse which, on one side, came close to the orbit of Venus, and on the other approached the circle made by the planet Mars on its journey around the sun.

"Here is our path, closer to the sun than the Earth has been; and also farther away. The hottest portion of this new path of this new planet about the sun already had been passed when we fled here. This world had made its closest approach in rounding the sun, and it had reached the point in its orbit which our earth had reached in April. Now we are going away from the sun, but on such a path that—and under such conditions that—only slowly will the days grow colder."

"They will become, when we get out on that portion of our path near Mars," a man among his hearers questioned, "how cold?"

Duquesne called upon his comic knack to turn this question. He shivered so grotesquely that the audience laughed. "The most immediately interesting feature of our strange situation will be, my friends, the amazing character of our days. Many of you have been told of that; so I ask you. Who will answer? Hands, please!" He pretended to be teaching a class of children. "How long will be our days?"

They nearly all laughed; and several raised their hands. "You, Mr. Tony Drake. You, I know, have become like so many others a splendid student of astronomy. How long will be our days?"

"Fifty hours, approximately," replied Tony.

"Excellent! For what determines the length of the day? Of course it is the time which the planet takes to turn upon its own axis. It has nothing whatever to do with the sun, or the path about the sun; it is a peculiarity of the planet itself, and inherent in it from the forces which created it at its birth. Bronson Beta happens to be rotating on its axis

in approximately fifty hours; so our days—and our nights—will be a trifle more than twice as long as those to which we have become accustomed. Now—hands again—how long will our year be? Let one of the ladies speak this time!”

“Four hundred and twenty-eight days!” a girl’s voice said. Her name was Mildred Pope.

“Correct,” applauded Duquesne, “if you speak in terms of the days of our perished planet. It will take four hundred and twenty-eight of our old days for Bronson Beta”—Duquesne, not without some satisfaction, stamped upon it—“to circle the sun; but of the longer days with which we are now endowed, the circuit will consume only two hundred and five and a fraction. It tears up our old calendars, doesn’t it? We start out, among many other adventures, with new calculations of time. So we will rotate in some fifty hours, and swing in toward Venus and out toward Mars, in our great elliptical orbit, making a circuit of the sun in four hundred and twenty-eight of our old days—which will live now only in our memories—or two hundred and five of our new days. Around and about, in and out, we will go—let us hope, forever.”

His audience was silent. Duquesne let them study his sketches on his natural blackboard before he observed: “A few obvious consequences will at once occur to you.”

Higgins, who had dropped his plants while he listened, gave his impromptu answer like a grade boy in a classroom: “Of course; our summers will be very hot, and our winters will be very cold and very long.”

DUQUESNE nodded. “Quite so. But there is one fortunately favorable feature. What chiefly determined the seasons on the old earth,” he reminded, “was the inclination of the earth upon its axis. If Bronson Beta had a similar or a greater inclination in reference to the plane of its orbit around the sun, all effects would be exaggerated. But we find actually less inclination here. Whether that may be a favorable feature ‘provided’ for us by some Power watching over this singularly fortunate party, or whether it is one of innumerable accidents of creation which have no real causative connection with our destinies, the fact remains: The equinoxes on Bronson Beta will not march back

and forth on the northern and southern hemispheres with such great changes in temperatures. Instead, as we round the sun at its focus,”—he pointed with his chubby finger,—“there will be many, many long hot days. Perhaps our equator at that time will not be habitable. And later, as we round the imaginary focus out here in space so near to the orbit of Mars, it may be very cold indeed, and perhaps then only the equator will be comfortable. So we may migrate four times a year. From the Paris of our new world to its Nice—I mean to say, from the New York City to its Miami. Does one think of anything else?”

HENDRON was looking tentatively from one face to the next of his Argonauts. He had been reasonably sure that Bronson Beta would travel in the ellipse Duquesne had described; and from the behavior of the celestial bodies at the time of the collision, he had formed his calculations; but he had not wanted to worry them with thoughts of excessive heat and extreme cold in their new home, and he had enjoined the other mathematicians, astronomers and astrophysicists to say nothing. He was pleased with the reaction of the people. There was no fear in their faces, no dismay. Only a great interest.

The silence was broken by a question from Dodson: “How close will we come to Venus and Mars?”

Duquesne shrugged. Eve turned to Dodson and said: “If my figures are right, it will be three million miles at periods many, many years apart. Three million miles from Mars, and at the most favorable occasion about four from Venus.”

Dodson’s eyebrows lifted. “Is that dangerous?”

Eve shook her head. “The perturbations of all three planets will, of course, be great. But as far as danger of collision is concerned, there is none.”

The group was thoughtful.

“There will be a great opportunity,” Dodson said slowly, “to study those two planets at close range. We must build a good telescope.”

“Telescope!” The word burst from Duquesne. His eyes traveled over the members of the group standing in front of him to the tall, shining cylinder of the Space Ship. There they remained; and slowly, one by one, the people turned to look at the Ark which had carried

them from Earth to Bronson Beta. They realized the meaning of Duquesne's steady gaze. There would be an opportunity in the future not only to study Venus and Mars at close range—but to voyage to them.

DUQUESNE dropped the stone with which he had been drawing, and stepped away from his diagram.

Eliot James walked over to Tony and Eve. "That is something I didn't think of," he murmured. "Something I didn't think of. Stupendous! Colossal!"

Eve smiled. "Father and I thought of it independently a long time ago. It will make your journey around the United States after the first passing seem pretty trifling."

James shook his head in agreement. "I'd want Vanderbilt with me again if I went on such a trip. And Ransdell." Abruptly he stopped. Vanderbilt and Ransdell had been lost on the other Space Ship. James flushed, as he looked at Eve. "I'm sorry, Eve. For an instant I forgot."

"It's all right." She took Tony's arm. "I want to go over and look at the ocean. It's a funny thing—looking at the ocean. Every time I stared out to sea on earth, I always expected to see a shark's fin, or a big turtle, or a jelly-fish, or a sail, or the smoke of a steamship; and I keep looking for such things on this one. And yet there can be nothing. Nothing at all." Her eyes traveled the expanse of ocean, and then she sighed. "Let's take a walk."

"Let's go back and look at that road in daylight."

Eve started. "We've left it all this time! Did you tell Father about it?"

"Not yet."

They went over to Cole Hendron. "Last night," Tony said, "Eve and I were out walking, and we found a road."

Ten minutes later everyone was gathered around the highway. It was made of a metal-like substance. It ran to the bluff along the sea and then turned south. Except for that single curve—a graded curve, which suggested that the vehicles that once traveled the road moved very swiftly, there was no other turn. In the opposite direction it drove straight toward the dim and distant hills. Its surface was very smooth. As the Argonauts had gathered around Duquesne's natural lecture-platform, so they now gathered around the metal monument Tony and Eve had seen in

match-light on the previous evening. Way was made for Bagsley, the paleontologist. He bent over and looked up with a curious smile.

"That isn't a job for me." His eyes were fastened on the inscription the metal slab bore. "You see, this is such a thing as might be found in the future of our earth, but not in the past. No ancient civilization in our world could make a road such as this, or use metal so skillfully."

"How about the writing?" some one asked.

Bagsley replied: "It's beautiful, isn't it? I wonder if we won't find that the curves in all those letters are mathematically perfect? That is, if they are letters. But I couldn't give you the faintest notion of what it says. It is not remotely related to Sanskrit, or Chinese, or Mayan, or cuneiform, or hieroglyphics, or runes; and it is equally remote from any modern writing."

Duquesne was talking again. "Anyway," he said, "whoever lived here had a language to write, and eyes to read it. They had roads to travel and vehicles to go upon them. So they had places to go to and to come from. The cities we saw, or thought we saw, must have been real. My friends, great as our adventures have been, there lie ahead adventures infinitely more astounding."

IN the face of so many necessities and so many unknown possibilities, any normal person would have lacked adequate judgment to do the right things in the right order. The colonists of Bronson Beta succeeded in a logical procedure because they had been chosen from a multitude of human beings better than normal.

On the first day of their sojourn they had rested.

On the evening of that day Bronson Beta had exhibited another phenomenon. Soon after dark, when more than half the members of the colony had gone to sleep from fatigue, a colossal meteor blazed across the sky and disappeared over the edge of the sea. It passed so close to the place where the Ark rested, that they had been able to hear a soft roar from it. It left a blaze upon the sky—a livid pathway of greenish-white fire which faded slowly. It was followed by another smaller meteor, and then half a dozen.

During the ensuing two hours countless thousands of meteors hurtled across

the atmosphere of Bronson Beta in the vicinity of the Ark, and many of them fell to earth within the visual range of that spot.

TONY and Eve were outside when the aërolites commenced to fall. At first they were spellbound by the majesty of the spectacle, but when a great hurtling mass of molten material splashed into the sea less than a mile offshore and set the ocean boiling all around, so that clouds of hot steam drifted over it, they became alarmed. Hendron and Duquesne were asleep, but there were twenty-five or thirty people outdoors.

In the afternoon of that day Tony had made his way some distance down the coast, and he had found a precipice carved by an ancient ocean from living rock. At its base were shallow cave-like openings, and above it three or four hundred feet of solid stone.

When several of the great masses of material had hit the earth so hard that it trembled beneath their feet, Tony quickly commanded the little knot of people who were standing together, watching the spurts of fire across the sky, to go to these holes in the rock wall. They started, with Eve leading the way. Tony then entered the Ark and woke Hendron, whom he found lying on the padded floor in sound, exhausted slumber.

Hendron sat up. "What is it?"

So effective was the insulation of the ship that the fall of meteors was not perceptible on its interior.

"Meteors," Tony answered. "Three of them have landed within a mile of here in the last few minutes. Big ones. Any one of them would annihilate this ship if it hit it. There were about thirty people outdoors. I sent them up the coast to some shallow caves at the foot of a basalt cliff. I thought it was safer there."

As he said the last words, he was following Hendron down the spiral staircase. They debouched on the gangplank; and as they did so, a dazzling, dancing illumination and a crescendo roar announced the fall of another meteor. It hit on the brink of the cliff overlooking the sea some distance down the coast. A million bright, hot particles splashed over the barren landscape, and an avalanche of melted metal crashed into the ocean. Hendron looked up at the sky, and saw a dozen more of these spectacular missiles pursuing

each other there. He turned instantly to Tony. "If one of those things hit the cliff where you sent the people, would it knock the cliff down?"

"I don't know. It's safer than the Ark, anyway."

"Right." Hendron rushed up the stairs, followed by Tony.

"How about the animals? Should we try to get them out?"

The living creatures—mammals, birds, insects—had been tended and fed but not yet moved. Where, outside, could they yet be established?

"The animals," said Tony, "will have to take their chances here."

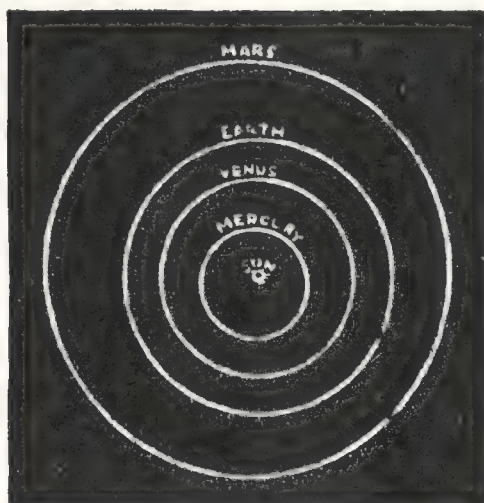
But Hendron and he awakened all the pilgrims who had been asleep. They were commencing to leave the Ark in an orderly but fast-moving line. Hendron was at the door of the Ark, and as the people emerged, he divided them into groups of five, and sent each group running in a different direction, thus dispersing over a wide area those of the colonists who were not hiding under the rim of the cliff.

The number of the astrolites increased with every passing minute, until the sky seemed full of them. The terrain was as brightly illuminated as by daylight; and from the gangplank Tony could see the little bands scurrying in their appointed directions.

WHEN they had all emerged, Hendron said to Tony shortly: "You go to the cliff and disperse the people there. I'll stay here with the last five."

The air was filled with parched, hot odors and clouds of steam. In the distance, around the craters made where the meteors had struck earth, there was a red glow. Half an hour passed. The pyrotechnics stopped. During that half-hour Cole Hendron had been busy in the upper control-room of the Ark with two electrical engineers; and when after five or ten minutes of normal darkness, interrupted only by spurts of the soft multi-colored aurora which frequently flickered on Bronson Beta, a few of the groups of five began to return to the Ark, they were halted by Cole Hendron's voice—a voice broadcast from the Ark by a mighty loud-speaker. It carried distinctly for a distance of two or three miles—a distance much greater than that which separated any of the bands.

"You will stay where you are," Hendron's voice commanded, "in groups of



The sun and the orbits of the four planets nearest it before Earth's collision with Bronson Alpha.

five for the remainder of the night. Try to sleep, if possible, but keep a long distance from the party nearest to you. I will summon you when the time comes."

Tony had rejoined Eve in a group of five along the base of the precipice. Eliot James was in that group, and two women—one of them Shirley Cotton, who was already a prominent person among the hundred and one odd people who had been prominent on earth. The two men and the three women slept fitfully on the hard earth that night; and in the morning with the first rays of dawn, Hendron's voice summoned everyone together again.

No more meteors had fallen after the shower had ended. The human beings who trekked back over the bare landscape to the Ark were a little more grave than they had been on the previous day. Once again the frailness of their hold upon their new home had been made plain. Once again they had been reminded of the grim necessities by which they would have to live. For in order to insure that some of them, at least, would be safe, they had been compelled on a moment's notice to desert all that they had brought with them from the earth, and run like dislodged insects into the night, into hiding.

All of them, because of their weariness, and in spite of the hard ground, had slept. Most of the bands had kept one member awake in turn as a watchman. Since the night on Bronson Beta was longer than the night on earth, they

had used the additional time for rest. Hendron first summoned them by calling on the loud-speaker; and then, for those who had marched out of sight of the Ark, he gave an auditory landmark by broadcasting over the powerful loud-speaker a series of phonograph musical records. The men and women in clothes now earth-stained, the former not shaven, and the latter not made up, straggled to the Ark to the music of "The Hymn to the Sun" and of Schubert's "Unfinished Symphony."

They answered a roll-call. No one had been harmed. The Ark was unscathed. They sat down to breakfast.

Hendron explained the unexpected dilemma of the previous night. "Unless I am greatly mistaken, our new planet passed through a cluster or path of fragments of the moon, destroyed, as you know, months ago. They would find orbits of their own about the sun; and we have approached again an area where we might encounter fragments of any size. I believe that the meteors which fell last night were debris from the moon.—debris scattered and hurled into space by that cosmic collision.

"In the future we will probably be able to chart the position of such fragments, so that we will know when we are coming within range of them. It is my opinion that the phenomenon was more or less local here, that we attracted to our surface a unified group of fragments scattered along a curve coinciding with our orbit, so that they dropped virtually in one place.

"I regret that the night which I had planned should be so peaceful for all was so profoundly disturbed. You are courageous. I would like to extend our period of rest to include this, our second day, on Bronson Beta. But so divergent and so pressing are the necessities of our work here, that I cannot do so. We will start immediately after breakfast to construct a cantonment which will be adequate at least temporarily."

CHAPTER II

CIVILIZATION RECOMMENCES

SUCH isolation, such solitude, such courage in the face of the unknown never before existed. One-hundred and three people ate their breakfast—one hundred and three people laughing, talking, saluting each other, staring often at the ocean and the greenish sky, and still

more often at the shining cylinder standing on end in their midst.

Cole Hendron walked over to Tony and Eliot James and his daughter, who were breakfasting together.

"Right after breakfast," he said, "I want you, together with Higgins, to start prospecting for farm lands."

Tony nodded. Two years before, the assignment would have appalled him. He would not have known whether beets were planted an inch under the surface of the soil or three feet, and whether one planted tubers or seeds; but he had been for a long time in charge of the farm in Michigan, and he was now well equipped for the undertaking.

"Bring back soil-samples. You understand the nature of the terrain which will be required—level and free from stones. It may be that you will find nothing in the vicinity that will be adequate; and if that is true we will consider moving the Ark. It is still good for a few hundred miles, I guess."

Eliot James grinned. "Or a few hundred million? Which?"

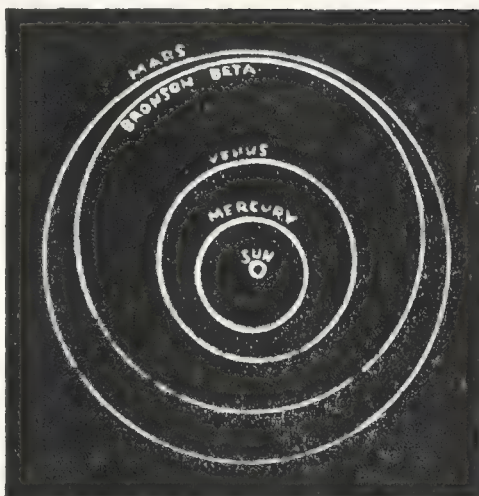
TO the surprise of all three, Cole Hendron did not respond with a smile. Instead he said simply: "I'd risk taking it up if we had to move in order to find a suitable place to raise food."

Tony understood that the leader of the expedition was entirely serious, and said with sudden intensity: "What's the matter with the Ark?"

"In the laboratory tests," the gray-haired man answered, "and in the smaller furnaces and engines we designed, Dave Ransdell's metal did not fuse or melt. But under the atomic blast, as we came through space, it commenced to erode. About eighteen hours after we had started, we went off our course because, as I discovered, the lining of one of the outside stern jets was wearing out more rapidly than the others. I used one of the right-angle tubes to reestablish our direction, and I made some effort to measure the rate of dissipation of Ransdell's metal. I couldn't be very accurate, since I could not turn off the jets, but I was not at all certain that the material would stand the strain until we had reached the point where we started falling on Bronson Beta."

"You mean to say," Eliot James exclaimed, "that we barely got here?"

Cole Hendron smiled, and yet his face was sober. "It turned out that we had a little margin. I examined the tubes



The sun and the orbits of the four planets nearest it after Bronson Beta replaced this Earth.

yesterday, and I dare say we could use them for a trip of another five hundred miles. But at both ends of the ship our insulation is nearly gone. We could not, for example, circumnavigate this globe."

The writer looked depressed. "I had imagined," he said, "that we would be able to cruise at will on the surface of the planet from now on."

Hendron turned his face toward the ship, which represented the masterpiece of his life of engineering achievements. He regarded it almost sadly. "We won't be able to do that. In any case we would move her over the surface of the planet only to find good farm land, because we've got to take her to pieces." "To pieces!"

Hendron assented. "We designed her for that very purpose. Those layer sections on the inside wall will be taken down, one by one, and set up again on the ground. The top section will be made into a radio station, so that we can go on listening for signals, and an observatory so that we can make accurate measurements of our orbit and also study meteorological conditions. The next section below that will be a chemistry laboratory. The one below that will be a hospital, if we need it. The next three will be storerooms, and we will turn the last section into a machine-shop. The steel on the outside hull will be our mineral source for the time being, and out of it we will make the things we need until it is exhausted."

His eyes twinkled. "I had anticipated we might have a great deal of trouble

in finding a source of iron ore and in mining it, but I dare say that some of the meteorites which fell here last night will not have buried themselves very deeply, so that we may have many tons of first-rate metal at our disposal when we need it."

"An ill wind," Eliot James said. "Still, I hate to think of the Ark being torn down. I had imagined we would go hunting for the others in it."

Tony spoke. "I'd been thinking about that. It seems to me that if anybody had reached here, we would have heard some kind of signal from them by now."

"I agree with you," said Hendron.

"And when I thought about looking for them, it seemed darned difficult. After all, Bronson Beta has an area of more than five hundred million square kilometers, and anyone of those five hundred million would be big enough to hide a ship like the Ark. Besides, we don't even know where the land is, except in a general way."

"I've got maps made from telescopic photographs," Eve said, "but they're not very good. Bronson Beta was mighty hard to observe—first with its atmosphere thawing, then its water. You could get a peek through the perpetual clouds at a little chunk of water or a small area of land now and again, but all the photographs I collected don't give a very good idea of its geography." She reached in her pocket and took out a piece of paper. "Here is a rough sketch I made of the East and West hemispheres; it isn't very good cartography, but it will give you some idea of what little we do know of the planet's surface."

They bent over the map for a few moments. Hendron said: "It would be like looking for a haystack on a continent, so that you could look for a needle in the haystack when you found it."

"And besides," Tony continued, "you might go over the place, where the people you were looking for were, at night, and in that case your jets would completely annihilate them."

COLE HENDRON'S face showed amazement. Then he said:

"By George, Tony, you're quite right! And do you know that although I spent a lot of time thinking about looking for other human beings here, and although I originally considered we would probably make long excursions in the Ark

until I realized it would be more sensible to take it down at once, it never occurred to me for an instant that our jets would be dangerous to anybody underneath, even in spite of the fact that I used it to wipe out that army of hoodlums that attacked us. It just goes to show what you may omit when you think. Still, I am of the opinion that we arrived here alone out of all the expeditions. If our crops fail us entirely because of too much heat, or because it gets cold too soon, or for reasons we cannot anticipate now—" He paused.

"Twenty-five or thirty of us might get through the winter on the provisions I've brought. But all of us couldn't."

With the injection of that grim thought into their breakfast conversation, the meal was brought to an end.

"It therefore behooves me," Tony said, "to look for farm lands, and get some sort of crops in."

Half an hour later Tony started out with Higgins. Tony carried a knapsack in which there was food enough for two days for both of them. He also carried a pair of blankets and a revolver. He had objected to the revolver, as it had been his wish to appear in complete possession of himself. Reason argued that there would be no phenomenon on the new planet which might make firearms useful, but imagination made the possession of a gun a great comfort, and Hendron had insisted he take it.

AS the two men started, the sound of hammering was already audible inside the Ark, and most of the members of the company were engaged in useful work.

A few watched their start. Tony reached into his pocket and took out a quarter. "I've carried this from Earth," he said to Higgins, "for just such emergencies. Heads we go inland; tails we go along the coast."

The coin landed with the eagle up. Tony flipped it again, saying as it spun in the air: "Heads we go north, tails we go south." Again the eagle. Tony pointed toward the coastline and said: "Forward."

The people who were seeing them off waved and called: "Good luck!"

"You'll have to abandon your botanical pursuits, I'm afraid," Tony said to the elderly scientist. "I usually hit a pretty fast pace. If I go too fast, let me know."

"Very well," Higgins said, and he chuckled dryly. "But I'd like to tell you, young man, that I've spent three sabbatical years climbing mountains in Tibet and Switzerland and the Canadian Northwest, and I dare say I'll be able to keep up with you."

Tony glanced at the scrawny, pedagogical little man at his side, and once more he felt almost reverent toward Hendron. Who would have thought that this student of plants, this desiccated college professor, was also a mountain-climber? Yet, since a plant biologist of the highest capabilities was essential to the company of the Ark, how much better it was to take a man who not only knew his subject magnificently, but who also could scale rugged peaks!

FOR an hour they walked along the bluff that faced the sea—a continuation of the landscape upon which the Ark had landed. It was rocky and barren, except for such ferns and mosses as they had already observed. Of dead vegetation there seemed to be nothing which had grown as large as a tree or indeed even a bush. The whole area appeared to have been what on earth would have been called a moor—though Higgins could recall no earthly moor of this character or evident extent. The ground inland was a plateau ranged with low hills, and in the remote distance the tops of a mountain-range could be seen.

At the end of an hour they saw ahead of them an arm of hills that ran at right angles down to the ocean and extended out in a long rocky promontory. At the foot of the promontory was a cove, and in the cove were beaches. They climbed to the highest near-by elevation and surveyed the arid, rock-strewn plateau.

"I don't believe," said Tony, "that there is any farm land in this area."

Higgins shook his head. "I think if we can find a place to get down over the cliff to the edge, we can go around that point at water level."

They continued along a little way, and presently Higgins pointed to a "chimney" in the precipice. He looked at Tony with a twinkle in his eyes. "How about it?"

Tony stared into the narrow slit in the rock. It was almost perpendicular, and only the smallest cracks and outcroppings afforded footholds and handholds. He was on the point of suggesting that they find a more suitable place to de-

scend, when he realized that the older man was laughing at him.

Tony set his jaw. "Fine!"

Higgins started down the chimney. He had not let himself over the edge before it was apparent that he was not only a skillful climber, but a man of considerable wiry strength.

Tony had always felt an instinctive alarm in high places, and he had no desire for the task ahead of him. Perspiration oozed from him, and his muscles quivered, as he lowered himself into position for the descent. It was ticklish, dangerous work. Two hundred feet below them lay a heap of jagged rocks, and around that the beach. Tony did not dare look down, and yet it was necessary to look for places to put his feet; and from the corner of his eye he was continually catching glimpses of the depth of the abyss below. His composure was by no means increased when the Professor below him called: "Maybe I should have gone last, because if you fall where you are now, you'll probably knock me off."

Tony said nothing. Twenty minutes later, however, he felt horizontal ground under his feet. He was standing on the beach. He was covered with perspiration; his clothes were soaked. His face was white. He looked up at the precipice which they had descended; and he said, with his best possible assumption of carelessness: "I thought that was going to be difficult. There was nothing to it."

The Professor gave him a resounding clap on the back. "My boy," he exclaimed, "you're all right! That was one of the nastiest little jobs I've ever undertaken."

There was sand under their feet now, and they slogged through it up to the end of the promontory, where the sea rolled in and broke in noisy gusts.

They walked around it. Before them was a vast valley. It stretched two miles or more to another series of hills. It disappeared inland toward the high mountains, and down its center meandered a wide, slow river.

TONY and Higgins stared at the scene and then at each other. The whole valley was covered with new, bright green, where fresh vegetation had carpeted the soil!

They ran, side by side, out upon the expanse of knee-deep verdure until they arrived, panting, at the river's edge.

The water was cold and clouded. After they had regarded it, they turned their heads in unison toward the distant range; for they realized that this, the first river to be discovered on Bronson Beta, was the product of glaciers in the high mountains. Higgins stepped back from the bank a moment later, and pulled up a number of mosses and ferns, until he had cleared a little area of ground in which he began to dig with his hands. The soil was black and loamy, alluvial and rich. He beckoned Tony to look at it. They knew then that their mission had been fulfilled; for here, not more than half a dozen miles from the Ark, along the valley of this river, was as fine a farm land as could be found anywhere on the old Earth. Here too water would be available for irrigation, if no rains fell.

There were no tides on Bronson Beta to make the river brackish at its mouth. Some one in camp had already announced that the sea was salt, saltier even than the ocean on Earth. Now Tony went to the river's edge, scooped up a handful of water and tasted it. He was mindful as he did so that he might be exposing himself to an unknown spore or an unheard-of bacterium, but recklessness had so long been a part of necessary risk, that he did not hesitate.

Higgins raised his eyebrows.

"Fresh," Tony said. "Fresh and cold." He unstrapped his canteen, poured out the drinking-water they had brought, and filled it with water from the river.

"We might as well go back," said Tony, "and tell them."

THEY collected samples of soil, then started back, side by side, avoiding the chimney by turning inland and following a gentle rise of ground over the promontory. They walked eagerly for a while, as they wished to hurry the news of their discovery to the camp; but they fell to talking, and their pace unconsciously slowed. It was not unusual that ardent conversation would occupy the colonists of Bronson Beta, for their problems were so grave, their hazards were so little understood, that they were constantly found in large or small groups, exchanging plans, suggestions, worries and ideas. Higgins was inclined, like many people of his type, to be pessimistic.

"My interest," he explained to Tony, "in finding various new forms of plant

life on Bronson Beta was purely scientific. I regard their discovery as a very bad omen."

"Why?"

"Wherever ferns and mosses will grow, fungi will grow. Fungi are parasitical. The seeds we have brought from Earth have been chosen through countless generations to resist the fungi of earth. But many of them, if not all of them, will doubtless fall prey to smuts and rots and root-threads and webs, which they have never encountered before and against which they have no resistance. It would have been better if what I had always maintained to be true were a fact."

"Which was what?" Tony asked.

HIGGINS snorted. "I wouldn't have believed it! For years I have been teaching that the theory that spores could survive absolute zero was ridiculous. I have had some very bitter quarrels with my colleagues on the subject. In fact,"—he frowned uncomfortably,— "I fear I have abused them about it. I called Dinwiddie, who made experiments with spores kept in liquid hydrogen, a pinhead. It is unfortunate that Dinwiddie has not survived, although I can imagine nothing more detestable and odious than to have to apologize to such an egotist. Dinwiddie may have been right about one matter, but he was indubitably wrong about hundreds of other theories."

Tony grinned at this carry-over of this curious man's prejudices and attitudes. They surmounted the central ridge of the promontory and scanned the landscape. Tony's eyes lighted on a feature which was not natural, and he suddenly exclaimed: "By George, Higgins, we should have followed that road! It went south a little inland from the coast, and there it is."

Higgins grunted. "So it is! But we'd have missed that splendid little climb of ours."

They walked together to the road and stepped upon its smooth hard surface.

"It will give us a perfect highway from that valley to the Ark," Tony said jubilantly. "Let's go back a few hundred yards."

They returned along the highway to a point from which they could see its descent into the river valley, where it turned and ran west along the side of the watercourse. Having satisfied themselves that it served the valley, they

turned again toward the Ark, following the road this time.

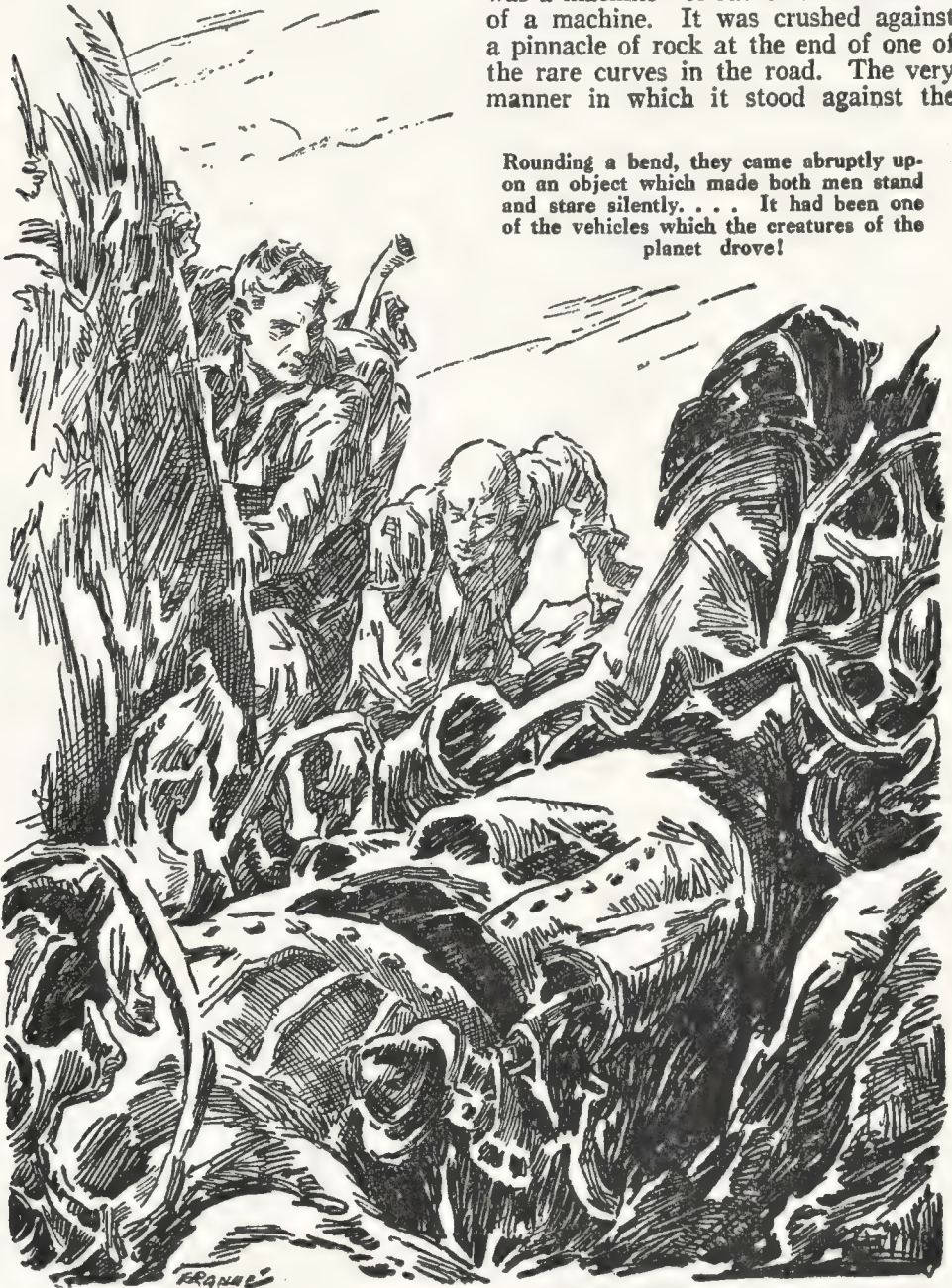
For several miles they came upon no other sign of the creatures that had lived upon the planet in the past ages—not even another of the slabs of metal neatly engraved with the unreadable writing. The road curved only when the natural topography made the problem of grading it very difficult. As a rule the Bronson Betans had preferred to cut through natural barriers or raise up a high road-

bed over depressions rather than to curve their road around such obstacles.

"It looks," said Tony, "as if they built these roads for speed. They didn't like curves, and they didn't like bumps. They went through the hills and over the valleys, instead of up and down and around."

There were a few bends, however; and upon rounding one of these, they came abruptly upon an object which made both of the men scramble from the road and stand and stare silently. The object was a machine—or rather what was left of a machine. It was crushed against a pinnacle of rock at the end of one of the rare curves in the road. The very manner in which it stood against the

Rounding a bend, they came abruptly upon an object which made both men stand and stare silently. . . . It had been one of the vehicles which the creatures of the planet drove!



rock wall suggested how it had arrived there: it had been one of the vehicles which the creatures of the planet drove or rode, and rounding the curve at too high a speed, it had shot off the highway and smashed head-on into the wall of stone.

THE two men looked at it, then went closer and looked again. They bent over it and touched it. They exchanged glances without speaking. The thing still glittered in the sunlight—the metal which composed it being evidently rust-proof. The predominating color of that metal was crimson, although many parts were steel blue, and some were evidently made of copper. An unidentifiable fragment lay on the ground beside it; and Tony, picking it up, found to his surprise that it was extremely light, lighter even than aluminum. The engine was twisted and mangled, as was the rest of the car. It was impossible to guess what the original shape of the vehicle had been, but it was conceivable that an expert, examining the débris, might decide what type engine had driven it.

Tony could not tell. He could see that it had not been a gasoline engine. It was not a reciprocating steam engine, or a turbine. Furthermore, it was not an atomic engine. There were wires and connections which suggested an electromotive force, but that was all. For a long time they looked at this mute record of age-old reckless driving. They could find no sign of the driver or of his clothing. Tony picked up the loose fragment of crimson, iridescent metal, and they went on down the road, for a while silent and thoughtful.

"An automobile," Higgins said at last.

"With an engine like none I have ever heard of."

"I know very little about such things. It looks like drunken driving, though."

"It must have been going frightfully fast."

"Did you see the wheels?"

"They were big."

"They didn't have pneumatic tires, just a ribbon of some yielding material around them."

"You wouldn't need rubber tires on a road as smooth as this."

"There were no people."

"Would they have been—people?"

Neither of them could answer that question. They walked quickly now and by and by in the distance they saw the summit of the Ark.

They ran to the encampment, bringing their news. . . .

Naturally the colonists were excited—even ecstatic—to know that apparently good farming land had been found within a few miles of the Ark. The value of the discovery was understood clearly by all of them. But they were human. It was the report of the strange machine wrecked by the roadside which set them ablaze with curiosity.

Even Hendron made no pretense of concealing it.

"The importance of finding the valley unquestionably outweighs your other discovery by a thousand to one. However, I share the feeling of everyone else here. The minute you said you had found a vehicle, a score of questions burst into my mind. No matter how badly wrecked it is, we can certainly tell what its motive force was, and more than that, we can get some idea of the creature or creatures who operated it. We can tell from the position of its controls how big they were and how strong they were. In fact, although it had been my intention to postpone archaeological research until we were more comfortably situated,"—Hendron smiled,—"*I know that I, for one, cannot stay away from that machine, and I am going to let everybody who feels they would like to see it, accompany me with you to the spot at once.*"

An hour later nearly everyone from the Ark was gathered around the machine. Bates and Maltby, who were perhaps the best engineers and mechanics among them, except Hendron, stepped out of the circle of fascinated onlookers. Behind them walked Jeremiah Post, the metallurgist of the company. These three men, together with Hendron, began painstakingly and slowly to examine the wreck. They worked without spoken comment, although occasionally one of them would point to a connection, or trace a cable with his finger; and even more frequently questioning looks and nods would be exchanged. They studied particularly the twisted and battered remnants of what had been the controls.

FINALLY Hendron, after a brief *sotto voce* colloquy with Post, Bates and Maltby, addressed the crowd of people, who had remained far enough away to leave room for those inspecting the discovery.

"Well, friends," he said simply, "until we have had time to take this apparatus

back to camp and study it more thoroughly, we will be unable to make a complete report on it. But we four are agreed on a good many things that will interest you. In the first place, judging from the area of space for passengers and the division of that area, whoever occupied and operated this machine could not have been much larger or much smaller than ourselves. You will note,"—he walked over to the wreck and pointed,—“that although the force of the crash has collapsed this portion of the vehicle, we may assume that its operator sat here.

“I say sat, because this is manifestly a seat. The vehicle steered with a wheel which has been broken off. This is it. The braking mechanism was operated by either of two flat pedals on the floor; and on what corresponds to a dashboard there were manual controls. Whether the creatures on Bronson Beta had hands and feet like ours cannot be said. However, that they had four limbs, that they were able to sit upright, and that their upper pair of limbs terminated in members which could be used precisely as fingers are used, is very illuminating. In fact, I won't say that the builders of this very interesting and brilliant vehicle were human beings; but I *will* say that if the vehicle were intact, it could be operated by a human being.”

HE paused for a full minute, while a babble of conversation swept his audience.

The talking stopped, however, when he continued: “As for the machine itself, it was made very largely of beryllium. Beryllium was a very common element on earth. It is, roughly speaking, about half as heavy as aluminum, and about twice as strong as what we called duraluminum. It was rare and valuable in a pure state only because we had not as yet perfected a way of extracting beryllium cheaply. The brilliant coloring of the metal is due to the addition of chemicals during its refinement and smelting, and I think it is safe to assume that the color was added for decorative rather than for utilitarian purposes. It is interesting to remark in that connection that the metal, which was rust-proof and tarnish-proof, is very much superior to the enamel finishes which we used for similar purposes.

“The principle upon which this vehicle was propelled is obvious in the sense that we have all agreed upon what

was accomplished by its engine, although further study will be necessary to reveal precisely how it was done.

“For the sake of those who are not physicists or engineers, I will explain that except for the atomic energy which we ourselves perfected, all terrestrial energy was thermal energy. In other words, it came from the sun. Oil represents the energy stored up in minute vegetation. Coal, the sunlight stored in larger plants. Water-power is derived from kinetic energy in water elevated by the sun to high places. Tidal energy may be also excepted, as it was caused by the attraction of the moon. Since we found electricity a more useful form of energy, we bent our efforts to the changing of thermal energy into electrical energy. Thus we burn coal and oil to run steam turbines, which in turn run dynamos, which generate electricity. We run other turbines by water-power, not to use their force directly, but in order again to generate electricity.

“All those systems were inefficient. The loss of energy between the waterfall and the power line, between the fire-box and the light bulb, was tremendous. It has been the dream of every physicist to develop a system whereby thermal energy could be converted directly into electrical energy. For most of you it will probably be difficult to understand more than that the engine of this vehicle of the ancient inhabitants of Bronson Beta was run by that precise method. Its machinery was capable of taking the energy of heat and turning it, in simple steps, into electricity.”

COLE HENDRON glanced at Duesquesne and Von Beitz, who stood near the vehicle. He spoke as if to them: “A stream of superheated, ionized steam was discharged at a tremendous velocity upon a dielectric, and the induced current ran the driving motor.” He turned to the others. “We must go back and go to work. As soon as we can spare the time, I will have this machine studied in complete detail.” He smiled. “I'd like to do it myself, as you can all imagine, but just now planting beans is more important. One other thing before we go back to our labors: you will probably all be interested to know that the reason this car is in such a demolished condition is that it must have been able to attain a speed of at least three hundred and fifty miles an hour.”

CHAPTER III

SOLITUDE

IN Eliot James' diary appears the following anecdote. It is dated Day No. 14:

"Higgins has classified most of the local flora, and in that connection an amusing thing happened.



Tony and Eve were outside when the aërolites commenced to fall. At first they were spellbound by the majesty of the spectacle; then they became alarmed.



every way. One of the *Pteridophyte*. Light-pressure has probably carried these spores all through space. It is the *Lycopodium Clavatum*. Found a sample with a *Prothallus* bearing young sporophyte,

"For the first two weeks of our stay here he hopped around like a madman, gathering specimens; and except for his expedition with Tony, it was impossible to make him do anything else. The whole group was at lunch outdoors one day when he came running in with some miserable little fragments of vegetation, yelling: 'I've got the brother of one we had on earth! Identical! Identical in

with a single sporangium and adventitious roots!'

"Even among our learned company this burst of botanical terminology caused a ripple of laughter. Hendron took the plant gravely from Higgins' hand, stared at it and said: 'It's club moss, isn't it?'

"Higgins nodded so that he nearly shook off his little goatee. 'Exactly, Hendron. Precisely. Club moss. We had it on earth.'

"Hendron then turned to his comrades and said: 'Dr. Higgins has brought up a principle which I have long intended discussing with you.' He held up the plant. 'Here is an insignificant bit of vegeta-

tion, which was known on earth as club moss, and also by the three jawbreakers the eminent Doctor has pronounced. To my mind, *club moss* is a fine name. To my mind, the use of Latin as a basis for terminology of the sciences is a little silly, especially since the last vestige of Rome is now reduced literally to atoms. So I was going to suggest that for the sake of the headaches of all future generations of students, as well as for the convenience of the human race which can memorize *club moss* more readily than *Lycopodium Clavatum*, we base the nomenclature of our new sciences, and reestablish the terminology of the old, upon English.

"We will have plants which belong to the genus *Moss*, the cohort *Rock Moss*, the species *Club* or *Creeping Moss*; and instead of *cohort* and *genus* we will say *class* and *type*. The main artery in the arm will not be known as the axillary, brachial and radial, hereafter, depending upon just what part of the artery is meant, but it will be known as the main artery in the arm at the armpit, the elbow and the wrist. Of course, I speak carelessly now, and our simplification will have to be made so that no name-value is lost. But since we are going to be a strictly scientific civilization, I see no reason why science should remain esoteric; and I wish as much effort would be made to use familiar terms for our scientific facts and features as will be made to introduce scientific terms into common speech."

"HIGGINS stood before Hendron, crestfallen, amazed. 'It couldn't be,' he said suddenly, almost tearfully. 'Why, I've spent years acquiring my technical vocabulary!'

"Hendron nodded. 'And you call a skunk—*Mephitis Mephitica*?'"

"Higgins said: 'Quite so.'"

"And what does *Mephitis Mephitica* mean?"

"Higgins flushed. 'It means something like—a—er—smelliest of the smelly.'"

"Everybody giggled. Hendron, however, was serious. 'Quite so. Now, I think *skunk* is a better name than the *smelliest of the smelly*, so if we find any skunks on Bronson Beta—a discovery I seriously doubt,—we will call them not *Mephitis Mephitica*, but just plain skunks. And in our classrooms we will teach the fact that they are nocturnal, burrowing meat-eaters, but we will ignore the *Mephitis Mephitica*.'

"Higgins shook his head sadly. 'It will mean the reorganization of all science. It will mean beginning at the bottom. It will be tragic. I suppose, my dear Hendron, that you will forget the *Laminariæ* and the *Fuci*, and call their ash *kelp*.'

"Hendron nodded again. 'I shall certainly have different names from *Laminariæ* for them, but whether we shall call their ashes *kelp* or not, is for the simplifier to say. Maybe we could just call them *seaweed ashes* and let it go at that.'

"BUT perhaps my penchant for summarizing at anniversaries should be given a little chance to function. We have been here two weeks. We have been working furiously.

"Great cranes surmount the top of the Ark. Already the uppermost layer has been removed and reassembled on the ground. Our settlement looks like a shipbuilding yard, but I think all our hearts are heavy with the knowledge that we are not building, but wrecking our ship. We have cut off escape to anywhere else. We have committed ourselves to life here.

"The peril of the planets in the sky on Earth, and the last tribulations of civilization, were great nervous driving forces in the days before the destruction. Those stimuli exist no longer. We sweat. Our atomic winches purr, and chunks of metal clank to the earth. At night our forges glow, and rivet-hammers ring.

"The food we eat is monotonous. No dietitian could give us a better balanced diet; but on the other hand, none of us is able to gratify those daily trifling appetites, which were unimportant on earth, but which up here assume great proportions. I saw Lila Parker become hysterical one day because she couldn't have olives with her lunch. It was not that she wanted olives so badly, but just that she was making an expression of the frustrations of all of us in such respects. Bread and beans and johnny-cake and oatmeal, and bacon and lentil soup and sweet chocolate and rice, together with yeast which we cultivate and eat to prevent pellagra, and other vitamins which we take in tablets, form a diet nourishing beyond doubt, but tiresome in the extreme.

"Some of us still sleep in the Ark. Some sleep in the observatory, and some in two different groups of tents. We remain scattered because of the possibility of a recurrence of the meteoric shower.

"One of the small atomic engines Hendron brought has been converted into the motor of a tractorlike machine which pulls a flat four-wheeled trailer back and forth to the river valley.

"Tony and twenty other men and women live in that river valley. They have used the tractor to plow, and already they have several hundred acres under cultivation. They work frantically—not knowing how long the growing season will be—knowing only that our survival depends upon their success. The sun has been very hot these days, and the heat increases through a strange, tremendous noon. Several of the people, particularly the women, have been severely sunburned, as the actinic rays appear to be much stronger on Bronson Beta than they were upon Earth.

"None of us has yet adjusted himself to the difference in the length of the day, so that the hours of light seem interminable, and we reach darkness exhausted. I have seen workers on the Ark, and men and women on the farm, fall asleep at their jobs in the later afternoon. On the other hand, since we are accustomed to sleeping at the most nine or ten hours, we are apt to wake up long before dawn. We have ameliorated this problem somewhat by dividing the labor into eight-hour shifts, with eight more hours for recreation. But this brings the free periods of all of us frequently in the dark hours, and there is little in the way of recreation available then, or any time; so we go on working, although nearly always a number of those who are enjoying a rest-period may be found in the circular observation-building, watching Von Beitz or one of the other electrical engineers as they continue their long and manifestly hopeless vigil at the radio-receivers. They occasionally vary that vigil by sending out into the empty universe a description of our position and an account of our situation.

"THE soil at the farm was judged excellent by the chemists. Bacteria have been sowed in it. Ants have been loosed there. Our grasshoppers are fattening on the local flora; their buzzing is the only familiar living sound except our own, and the occasional noises of the animals we tend. Every day the tractor brings over the Other People's road an iron tank of drinking- and cooking-water from the river. We had at first utilized sea-water, which we distilled; but the water in the river was found to

be pure and apparently without bacteria, so we have given up our distillation.

"We would like to restock the sea with fish, but we are doubtful about the possibility of establishing a biological economy there. We have numerous fishes in an aquarium on the Ark, and perhaps at some later date we shall make the attempt.

"SHIRLEY COTTON has fallen more or less in love with Tony. I would not enter this in a diary that is perhaps to be history, except for the fact that she announced it to everyone the other day, and said that she was going to move for a system of marriage codes by which she could compel him to become her mate as well as Eve's. It must have saddened Eve, although she has said nothing about it, and appears not to mind. But Shirley has pointed out what everyone has often thought privately—there are thirteen more women than men. All the women but five are under forty years of age. Nearly half the men are more than fifty. Our other party, which appears lost, contained more of the younger people.

"So at the end of two weeks we find ourselves disturbed by many questions, working hard, and realizing slowly the tremendous difficulties to be conquered.

"Yesterday and the day before it rained. The days were like any rainy ones on earth, with gray skies and an incessant heavy drizzle that crescendoed to occasional downpours. The river at the farm rose. The earth around us became a slough of mud, and we tramped in and out of the Ark dejected, despondent, soaked and uncomfortable. When the skies cleared, however, Tony was jubilant. His wide acres were covered with even rows of green, and indeed, the farm was a beautiful spectacle. Hendron ordered Kyto to serve a meal which was an anticipatory thanksgiving.

"We have moved our animals to the farm and put them in stockades where some—the most valuable, fortunately, the cows and sheep—thrive so far, on the ferns and mosses which we have mixed with the last of the fodder brought from earth. Other of the animals do not do so well; and if they die, it is the last we shall see of their species. But shall we ourselves survive?

"On reading the above, it seems that my tone is melancholy; and I feel that it cannot be otherwise. Pressure of work and the reaction to our months of

strain and danger, and contemplation of the awful though splendid perils of the flight from earth, have brought about this state of mind. We may be—are, for all we know—the only living, intelligent beings in all the cosmos; one hundred and three of us,—many past the prime of life,—stranded in this solitude with two cows, two sheep, two deer, a few ants, grasshoppers, fungi, bacteria and bees that we have brought with us. We are now feeling the grinding despair that castaways must know, except that we cannot have the hope of rescue, and still worse, we have abandoned the hope of any other fellowship than our own. Solitude—exile—loneliness!

"The children—the little boy and girl whom, thank God, we brought—are the bright lights in our emotional gloom. Their eagerness, their amusing behavior, their constant loyalty and affection, point us more powerfully than anything else to an untiring hope.

"If there were more children—if babes were born among us, new members of our race, this awful feeling of the *end* might be lifted. But who would dare to bear children here? Eve? Shirley?"

Eliot James, on this despairing note, interrupted his record.

TWO matters recommend themselves for comment at this point. One concerns Kyto, the quick-witted, obedient Japanese, who had so honorably, as he would have said, followed his master's cause and was now one of the mysteries of Bronson Beta. Everybody talked of Kyto. Naturally, the little Jap was no longer Tony's servant. No one would have servants again. His handiness in the matter of the preparation of meals had made him gravitate to the commissariat in the first few days. But it began to appear at once that Kyto was more than a good cook.

On the third day, when Shirley Cotton had been instructed to inform Kyto on the matter of vitamins and balanced diets, she discovered that he knew fully as much about the subject as she. His budgeting of the food supply was a masterpiece. Unaided, he organized a store-room system and made plans for its transference. Indeed the eventual discoveries about Kyto surpassed even the wildest guesses of the colonists.

The other matter concerned Hendron:

Others beside Eliot James had observed, and with concern, the change in the leader; and they began to discuss it.



A long finger of light began combing the sky for the vanishing plane.

Tony knew that he himself was talked of as a candidate for commander of the group—governor of the camp—if Hendron was to be replaced; so Tony was especially careful to refrain from criticism. In addition to his sincere loyalty and devotion to Hendron, there was the further fact that Eve became even more fanatically devoted to her father as his difficulties increased.

"Tony," she asked him, "what do they—the opposition—say about Father?"

"There's no real opposition," Tony denied. "We'd be crazy to oppose each other; we'd be stark insane! A hundred and three of us upon an empty planet. Surely we've more sense than that."

"Tony, tell me," insisted Eve, "what you hear them say! Father's through? They want another leader; isn't that it?"

"No," denied Tony. "They want him to *lead* again; that's all. He's not doing it now as he did, you know."

"But he will again!"

"Of course he will."

"They're so unfair to Father!" Eve cried. "How much more of a man can they expect? He brought them—those

who criticize him—he brought us all through the greatest venture and journey of mankind; and they complain that now he rests a little, that he does not immediately explore. Does it occur to nobody that perhaps Father is too wise to explore or to permit others to wander off—exploring?”

“I’ve told them I agree with your father,” Tony said. “I agree that our first procedure should be to establish ourselves where we are by hard work.”

“But do you really agree, Tony?”

“Well,” said Tony honestly, “it would certainly be more pleasant to explore.”

“But it must not be done now; not yet. And you know why.”

“Yes,” said Tony; for he was too familiar with Hendron’s fears—which were these: since the spores of certain plants had manifestly survived upon Bronson Beta, it was probable up to the practical point of certainty that spores of disease-inducing bacteria also had survived. These would be found where the previous “hosts” of the bacteria had dwelt and died—that is, in the villages and the cities of the Other People.

So Hendron, in this new mood of his, feared the finding of dwellings of the Other People; he forbade, absolutely, further exploration.

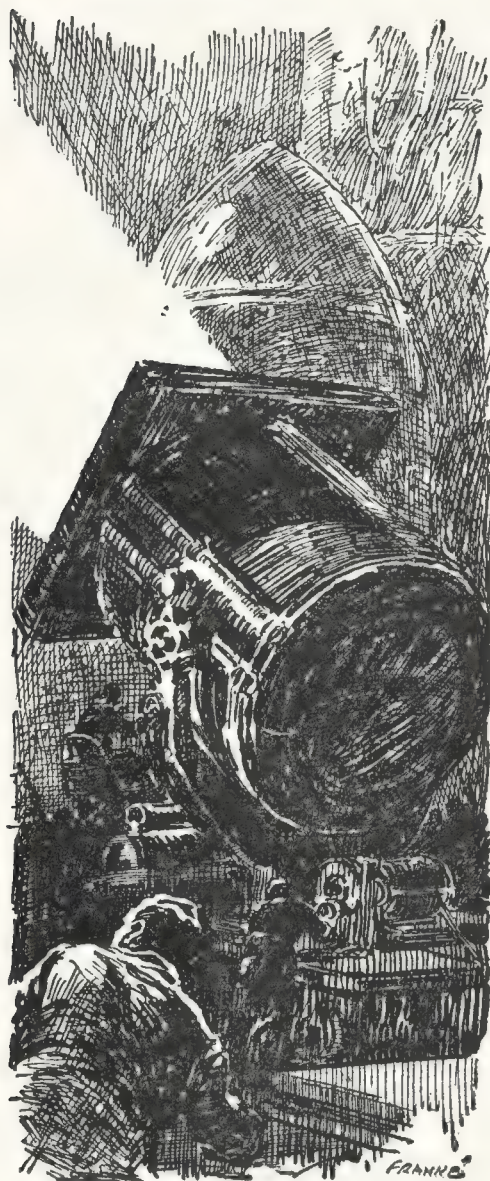
Hendron was tired; he had borne too much. He had brought his people over through space, having dealt with and conquered the most tremendous risks; and now he would risk no more. He became obsessed with a passion to preserve and keep safe these followers of his, whom he considered the last survivors of the human race.

YET, against all his care and caution, death came to the camp. On the morning of the twentieth day, after the slow, dragging dawn when the sun so leisurely arose, two men were found lying in a strange stupor. They were Bates and Jeremiah Post. Before sunset of that long day, twenty more—both men and women—were afflicted, and the physicians had isolated all the sick and ailing.

The epidemic, while somewhat resembling the “sleeping sickness” of earthly days, differed from it in important aspects. It might be, Dodson announced, due to an infection carried from the world and which had developed on this new planet, and which, in the strange environment, exhibited different characteristics. It might be caused by some infective agent encountered on Bronson Beta.

Was it significant that Bates and Jeremiah Post, who had dug from the soil the wreck of the Other People’s vehicle, were the first affected? And Maltby soon afterward was sick. Twenty-six persons altogether fell ill; and three died—Bates, and Wardlow, a chemist, and one of the girls who had served as a nurse to the sick—Lucy Grant. The rest made complete recoveries; no one else was later affected; the strange plague passed from the camp.

But of the hundred and three emigrants from earth—perhaps the sole survivors of humanity in all creation—



three were dead. And Tony Drake ordered the breaking of the strange soil of Bronson Beta for the first burials of Earth People! Three new interments to add to the uncountable graves of the Other People who were yet to be discovered!

Hendron, who himself had not fallen sick, was by far the most disturbed by these deaths that had come to the camp; thereafter he doubled his restrictions.

IT was Higgins the botanist, who at length openly defied the leader.

Higgins took four of the younger men—and under other circumstances Tony unquestionably would have joined them—and went off. At that time Hendron was endeavoring to make a new set of gears, and a chassis and a body, for a second atomic-engine vehicle, using metal from the wall of the Ark; and although he engaged more than twenty people in the operation, it was progressing very slowly. Moreover they had just passed through another three days of heavy rain, and while it was good for the gardens, nevertheless the people who lived in tents were extremely miserable. They were studying the possibility of having to live altogether in one or two of the round sections of the Ark during the coming winter, as it would be impossible to erect metal houses by that time; and everyone was dejected over the idea of passing nearly two earth years sleeping on the padded floor of a chamber in the Ark in one great communal group.

Higgins and his party were gone for four days, and anxiety about him became so acute that music was played on the great broadcasting machine constantly during the day, and at night a searchlight shot into the air a vertical beam which was visible for many miles.

Late on the afternoon of the fourth day the exploring party returned.

The five came down the Other People's road from the west, walking with rapid, swinging strides, plainly in triumphant excitement.

Higgins reported for them all when they halted, surrounded by their friends:

"We covered about seventy-five miles. We saw a great desert. We went into a valley where a mighty tangle of fern trees is beginning to rise toward the heavens. We saw glaciers on the top of those distant mountains. I have seen excavations in an old pit where the fossils of animals that were extinct during the

civilized period on this planet were being dug out. And we encountered, not ten miles from here, on the Other People's road, something that will very largely relieve one of our great difficulties."

With that he unstrapped his pack, opened it, and dumped out at Hendron's feet a dozen objects upon which Hendron dropped eagerly.

They were wood, chips of wood. Hard wood—soft wood. Finely grained wood, and wood with a coarse, straight grain.

"Is there much of it?" Hendron asked, as he examined the chips.

Higgins nodded. "It isn't related to any of the wood on earth, and there are many interesting features about this vegetation which I will outline in a monograph later, but it is vegetation. It is wood. It comes from the trunks of trees, and there is enough of it standing, seasoned, perfectly preserved, to supply us with all the lumber we can use for generations.

"YOU have assumed," he continued, speaking directly to Hendron, "that this planet upon which we stand was long ago drawn away from its orbit about some distant sun—some star. We have assumed that, for uncounted ages, as upon the world which bore us, this planet followed its prescribed course about its sun until, by the close passing of some other star, its orbit was disturbed, and this planet, with its companion world which destroyed our earth, was cast out into space and cold and darkness.

"The appearance of the forest that we found completely accords with your theory of this planet's past history. There stood a great forest of many varieties of trees, none exactly resembling those of our world, yet of their general order. They seemed to have been deciduous trees mostly; their leaves had fallen; they lay on the ground; the boughs were bare.

"There must have been a long, last autumn followed by a winter without parallel on our world and previously on this planet. All water froze; air froze, preserving the forest as it was at the end of that awful autumn when no thaw came through the millions of years in outer space until this planet found our sun.

"I have said that the trees I examined were unlike the trees on earth; yet their trunks and boughs were wooden; their leaves encumbered the ground. Here are

a few of the leaves. . . . I am taking the liberty of calling this one maple, and this one oak, and this one spruce, and this one elm."

The exiles from earth pushed close to finger the leaves and bits of wood, so strange and yet suggesting the familiar. These promised them homes, rooms of their own, chairs, tables, cupboards and book-shelves and writing desks, and a thousand other things dear to their emotional memories. And yet it was odd to see Duquesne, the great French physicist, weeping, and Dodson, the dignified dean of New York surgery, hurling an old felt hat into the air and yelling at the top of his lungs, simply because a wiry little man with a goatee had showed them a few chips of wood.

Tony drew close to Eve. "We'll be outcasts no longer—outcasts!" he emotionally murmured. "We'll have a house and a wood fire again!"

"We?" whispered Eve. "We? You and I? We'll be allowed to marry and live by ourselves?"

They were near to Hendron, but he seemed not to hear them.

"Did you go to the other edge of the forest?" he asked of Higgins.

"There was no sign of the edge as far as we went. The road we followed went through the forest, and before we came to the woods, there were two cross-roads. We considered both of them; but we went on, as we have told you, deep into the forest; and returned, as you see."

THEY were all sitting around a fire on that night, after those first moments of gentleness and of affection when they had been brought electrically back to the happy past, when once again their hopes had risen.

It was night, and dark; and there was no moon. Nor would there ever be a moon. They had been singing softly; and one of their number—Dimitri Kalov—had slipped away from the fire and talked to Hendron, and gone to the Ark and come back with a piano-acordion strapped around his shoulders. No one had seen him return, but suddenly from out of the darkness came a ripple of music.

The singing stopped, and they listened while Dimitri played. He played old songs, and he played some of the music from Russia which his father had

taught him. Then, between numbers, when the applause died and a hush fell over the group, as they waited for him to begin again, there was a sound.

IT was soft and remote, and yet it transfixed everyone instantly, because it was a sound that did not belong to any human being. It was a sound that did not belong to their colony. A sound foreign and yet familiar. A sound that rose for a few instants, and then died out to nothing, only to return more strongly than before.

One by one they turned their faces up, for the sound was in the sky. It approached rapidly, above them, in the dark. There was no mistaking it now. It was the motor of an airplane. An airplane on Bronson Beta! An airplane piloted by other human beings, or perhaps—they did not dare to think about the alternative.

Nearer and nearer it came, until some of them could discern the splotch of darkness against the stars. But then the ship in the heavens seemed to see their fire on the ground and be alarmed by it, for it switched its course and started back in the direction from which it had come.

Hendron rushed toward the observatory and shouted to Von Beitz, who was on duty at the radio, to turn on a searchlight. Von Beitz must have heard the airplane too, for even as Hendron shouted, a long finger of light stabbed across the sky and began combing it for the vanishing plane. It caught and held upon the ship for a fraction of a second before it plunged through a sleazy cloud, but that second was not long enough for anyone to tell what manner of ship it was, or even whether it was a ship such as might have been made by the people of the earth. A speck—a flash of wing surface. And the clouds.

They sat, stricken and numb. Surely, if there had been human beings in that ship—surely if it had contained other refugees from the destruction of the earth—it would have circled over their fire time and again in exultation.

But it had fled. What could that mean? Who could be in it? What intelligence could be piloting it?

The pulsations of the motor died. The light was snapped off. The colonists shuddered.

They were not alone on Bronson Beta.

This fascinating story of the Cosmic Pioneers continues through even more interesting developments in the next installment—in our forthcoming December issue.

The Splendid Thieves

By JAMES FRANCIS DWYER

Illustrated by Alfred Simpkin

THE buildings looked strangely vicious. This group of squat workshops huddled together on the waste had a suggestion of evil. It was a pariah cluster, set apart for some nefarious purpose. Thug-like, sinister, satanic. Ringed by a stone wall topped with a thick mesh of barbed wire.

One road led to the cluster, a road gashed by the wheels of supply-camions. It came from the east, sweeping across a plain of spiny undergrowth and diving through an archway in the encompassing wall.

By the side of this road, stomach-flat in the underbrush, and a distance of half a mile from the buildings, lay a watcher: a youth of twenty-four. Ceaselessly, carefully he swept the workshops and the archway with his binoculars. But the gateway received special attention. Always when the glasses roved over the buildings, they came to rest on the opening in the wall where four sentries swapped stories that occasionally brought head- and shoulder-movements which, to the watcher, suggested laughter.

He wondered why the sentries laughed. From what he had been told, he knew that the dwellers in this camp in the wilderness were picked soldiers, chemists, and mechanics who were never allowed to leave the place. Three hundred of them! They had been taken there weeks and weeks before, taken there with a secret. A tremendous secret! The watching youth thought their stories must be threadbare. And there were no women in the place to produce the kind of spicy gossip particularly appealing to sentries. Women could not be trusted near the great secret. To the female, a secret is a verbal Adonis that her curiosity longs to possess.

The wrist-watch of the youth attacked the fourth hour of his vigil. Again he reviewed his instructions: He had been told to wait in the undergrowth on this

particular afternoon, and if occasion arose, he was to give assistance to a man who would make an attempt to leave the place of mystery. If the man got away without trouble, he, the youth, would be merely a spectator; if there was trouble, he was to make himself useful to the departing one.

These instructions had been given by a gray-haired chief who controlled a body of men whose exploits were never made public. This chief had eyes like frosted blue jade. A lovable man. Those who went here and there at his bidding called him affectionately "Brave Eyes." They loved him greatly because, although he sent them on dangerous missions, he was behind them with a vigor and courage that startled them. Often when they thought they were lost, they found "Brave Eyes" mysteriously at their elbow guiding them to a haven that they hadn't known of.

The youth pondered over the secret hidden in the guarded workshops. Something dreadful was being manufactured in the place. Some strange form of poison gas, perhaps. Or germs—horrible germs that would wipe out a world! Some monstrous culture of a maniacal scientist that, released upon an unsuspecting universe, would leave it lifeless and barren.

The thought brought a cold chill. The youth hated germs. Of course the work going on within the place must surely be of a destructive order, because of the secrecy hedging it. Also the interest shown by Brave Eyes. The man within the buildings was a subordinate of "Brave Eyes." By some means he had wormed his way into the place to find out what dreadful potion was being mixed for a weary, war-battered world. Perhaps the sentries were laughing at the thought of the grimaces the rest of the world would make when the evil brew was flung at them! The thrown-back heads and stamping of feet might not be the result of cheap wit. The ac-

The old Greek idea of the passing of the torch upon which our modern relay race is founded has here been made into one of the most unusual and thrill-filled stories ever printed.



Through the archway came a horse at full gallop, the rider crouched over the neck of his mount. Sentries went sprawling into the dust.

tions were possibly caused by the visualized astonishment of the stricken world when the pill from the wastes was administered!

The hands of the youth's watch crept toward five. There was a stillness now upon the group of workshops, a stillness that curiously suggested the approach of clamor. And at seven minutes before five there occurred the explosion.

Through the archway came a horse at full gallop, the rider crouched over the neck of his mount. Two sentries, directly in the path of the horse, went sprawling in the dust. Their surprised comrades clawed at their holsters, drew and blazed at the rump of the steed. A steam siren within the walls screamed like a lost soul.

The binoculars of the youth in the underbrush clung to the rider. Before the escapee had covered a hundred yards four other horsemen spurred through the gate in pursuit. Behind the four came running workmen and soldiers—scores of them! They were spewed through the gateway. Blue-jacketed atoms that ran madly after the mounted pursuers. The place had the appearance of a disturbed ants' nest. The siren wailed; the bullets of firing soldiers raised dust-flickers beneath the belly of the leading horse.

The youth in the brush was on his knees now. His lips were a gray line, his jaws ached, his heart pounded mightily. The horseman leading the procession that came toward his hiding-place was the man he had been sent to help! That was evident. The hoped-for secret departure was off. Plainly, something had gone wrong.

ONE of the four mounted pursuers started out to cut down the distance that separated him from the escaping one. With whip and spur he drove his mount, a big lumbering gray that screamed under the pain of the rowels. The intervening stretch dwindled with the flying seconds. The glasses of the youth were gummed on the two. They constituted his world.

The fugitive glanced behind him. The man on the gray tried a long-distance revolver shot—another and another. Suddenly the pursued horseman straightened himself, half turned in his saddle and flung up his right hand. The lumbering gray horse crashed in a cloud of dust.

Broken phrases of admiration thrust themselves through the tightly-closed

lips of the youth in the brush. This fellow who rode like a centaur and shot like a scout was worth helping. Brave Eyes had sent a man into the place of dreadful mystery—a real man.

The youth dropped the binoculars and took a heavy automatic from within his jacket. He could kill the three pursuers as they fled by him. He watched the escaping one. Still pressed low over the neck of his mount, the man turned swift glances on the prickly undergrowth that bordered the road. It was evident that he knew the youth was there. He had been told that a helper was at hand.

The youth took a chance. As the rider thundered down upon him he flung up his hand. For an instant only. There were glasses in the buildings with keen eyes behind them.

THE rider saw. A look of intense relief appeared upon his drawn face. By quick nervous gestures he drew the attention of the youth to the short-handled whip he carried. Then, as he galloped by the hiding-place he tossed the whip from him. Flung it covertly toward the brush that fringed the road!

The action changed the plans of the youth. He had been ready to drop the three pursuers as they galloped by him, but now he knew that the safety of the pursued was nothing in comparison to the value of the object he had tossed from him. Nothing at all. The whip held the secret of the squat buildings! The rider thought it more important than his own life.

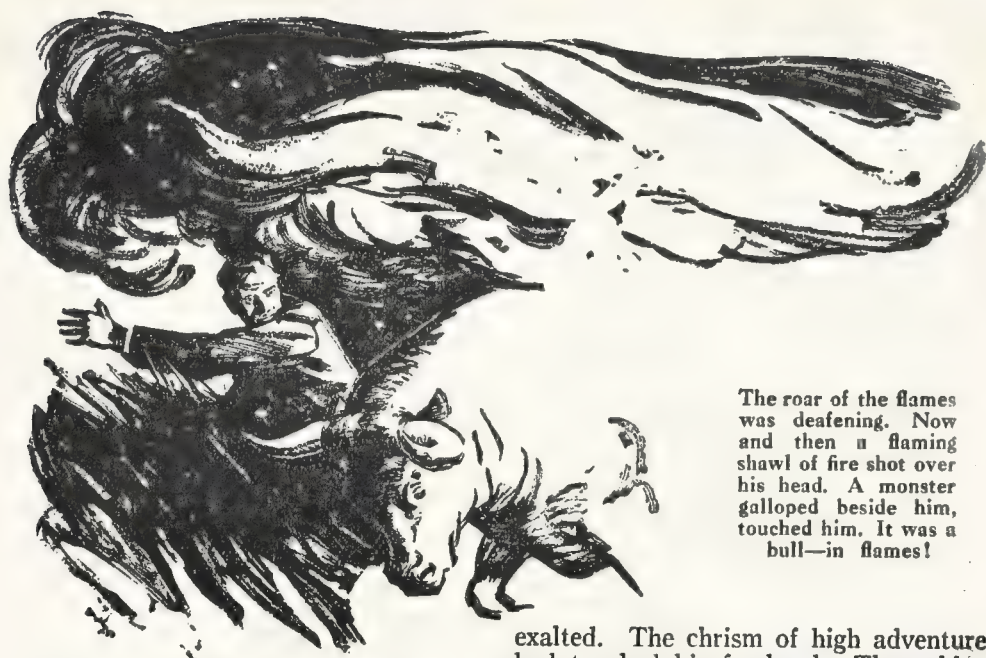
The three pursuing horsemen thundered by. The youth held his breath. They might see the whip! They might guess!

The horse of the leader shied at the whip, thinking it a snake in the dust. The rider, thrown forward, made an awkward recovery, cursed loudly and spurred again after his two companions. A dust-cloud hid them.

The youth clawed his way through the matted undergrowth in the direction of the whip. He couldn't rise to his feet. Eyes were sweeping the plain.

A great pride came to him. His was the main rôle now. The lean-faced man who rode like a centaur and faced death with a smile on his face had turned the leading part over to him.

The thorns tore the jacket from his back as he burrowed through them; they made bloody striæ on his flesh. They



The roar of the flames was deafening. Now and then a flaming shawl of fire shot over his head. A monster galloped beside him, touched him. It was a bull—in flames!

were living, devilish things that tried to hold him back.

Shots came to his ears. Three shots, then a volley. He knew that the lean-faced rider had been the target for the volley. He felt certain because of the sudden immunity from pain that came to him. The sudden uplifting. The lean-faced one was dead. His soul had flashed back to the side of the boy to spur him forward. That high unselfish soul. . . .

The bleeding face of the boy broke through the thorny brambles and scanned the road. There was the whip in the dust. Out of reach, though. And he couldn't show himself in the roadway. From the barred windows of the evil cluster of buildings eyes were watching.

He tore a branch from a stunted tree and tried to scoop the whip toward him. The ground brought to his ears the clatter of hoofs. The killers were riding back. He knew they were killers. Picked murderers guarded those buildings in the wastes. And the foot-runners were coming—a horde of them.

He scooped the whip toward his outstretched hand. He seized it. Its possession sent a flash of ecstasy through him. His body tingled. Still on all fours, he turned and scuttled back from the road.

Strange how the death of the lean-faced rider had brought a contempt for the devilish thorns. The thorns ripped him more cruelly than ever, but he didn't feel pain. He was lifted up, curiously

exalted. The chrism of high adventure had touched his forehead. The golden spear of leadership had been thrust into his hand. Within the whip was the solution of the dreadful mystery. Concealed in it was a cipher that would explain everything to old Brave Eyes. The youth knew.

Pausing now for an instant to get his breath, listening with hungry ears to the shouts exchanged between the returning horsemen and the foot-runners. Triumphant yells from the horsemen. Yes, the escaped man had been killed, but the swine in his death agony had got one of them. Where in hell was the doctor?

ANOTHER horseman came galloping from the walled-in workshops—a fat man with the mantle of authority. He screamed questions. Had the two horsemen searched the body of the fugitive? The horsemen answered in the affirmative. Nothing in the pockets? No papers, no letters? The horsemen shook their heads. One shamefacedly produced a handful of small coins.

The fat man cursed them. They were fools, idiots! There must be something on the fellow. *Something!* Did they hear? Why the devil was he in flight if he had nothing?

A score of workmen were rushed forward to comb the body of the dead. The fat man told them to tear his clothing to shreds. They were to look in his hair, in his mouth, in his ears, in his boot-heels. Look for something. *Something!* Paper, plans, secret writing!



Out of the welter of commands and curses sprang the word "whip." It ripped through the air, blasphemies trimming it. The dead man's whip. The youth, stomach in the dust, taut as a bowstring, listened.

One of the mounted killers loosed a howl. The fellow had some horrible obstruction in his speech, lack of a palate, perhaps. But he drove words out, flogged them into the silence that followed his queer howl. His horse had shied at something on the road! Thought it a snake! It might have been the whip! The *whip!*

Up rose the cry of the pack, giving tongue. The dreadful stumbling speech of the horseman trying to feed the question hunger! Way back, he had seen the whip. No, no, farther! Near the bushes. His horse had seen it, and had nearly thrown him. There! *There!*

See the mark in the dust! A snake? No, no, no! Keep the swine back! Back, you scum! Some one—some one hiding in the underbrush had used a branch to scoop the whip from the roadway!

On hands and knees the youth drove through the underbrush. They were after him now. After him and the soul of that lean-faced one that was with him, helping him—strengthening him.

His exaltation grew. He was alive in a way that was strange and thrilling. He and the lean-faced one were saviors of a world. They were standing between it and destruction. That evil cluster in the wilderness! Hell's broth was being brewed there! For whom? For the world! For the civilized world! Hell's broth to be poured out by devils into whose hearts had entered the gangrene of hate!

Clamor rose in the rear. Orders, curses, yells of rage. They were sweeping through the undergrowth—in line formation. A hundred of them. Emptying revolvers into matted clumps that defied close inspection.

The youth, the whip knotted around his neck, rushed forward, regardless of pain. He had to carry on till some one relieved him. "Brave Eyes" had confidence in him. The old stout-heart had chosen him and the lean-faced man as links in the chain where the strain was greatest. The soul of the lean-faced one was whispering to him: "Toughest jobs for you and me," it said. "He knew us! Good kid! We'll beat 'em! We'll save the world, you and I! Bit of paper in the handle of the whip! Got to get it to the old chief."

The stretch of prickly undergrowth thinned. Before the youth was a sandy slope of some two hundred yards—bare. Beyond this again was a mile-wide sweep of tall reeds leading to the banks of a swift-flowing river. The youth had come up the bank of the river that morning.

HE rose to his feet and started at full speed across the sandy slope. In the reeds he would be safe. He would get to the river and swim downstream.

He had nearly reached the reed-bed when one of the horsemen saw him. A yell like a streak of scarlet shot up from the hunters. A dreadful yell. Revolvers barked. The youth was out of range, but the pursuers fired to hearten themselves against the thorny brush through which they ran.

Soft were the reeds, splendidly soft. Tall, so that the youth could run without stooping. The afternoon was closing in. Ahead was the river. The soul of the lean-faced man whispered to him. He and the lean-faced man were one. One! They were welded by the confidence that their chief placed in them. Welded by his magnificent faith in their courage.

A whiff of smoke came to the nostrils of the fugitive. He sniffed hungrily. *The mob in the rear had fired the reeds!*

There was a following wind—a fierce harrier wind that ran three yards to the youth's one. It was showing its speed



by bringing up smoke-clouds and slapping them in his face.

It brought the roar of the trampling flames. Fine food for the flames were the reeds. Living things ran with the youth. Strange animals that yelped and whined as they ran. He tripped over them, felt their furry bodies against his legs. The lean-faced dead man whispered: "They'd meet death later," he said. "Human and animal! No escape! World a morgue. Silent, terrible! It's all in the handle of the whip. Good kid! Get it to old Brave Eyes!"

The youth was suffocating. The roar of the flames was deafening. Now and then a flaming shawl of fire shot over his head. A monster galloped beside him, touched him. It was a bull. A bull in flames! . . .

The ground dropped from the youth's feet. He shot into space. He went down, down into some beautiful cooling fluid, came to the surface choking, and gave himself up to the current of the river.

"We were nearly outed then," he gasped. But the soul of the dead man thought differently. "Not a bit of it!" it whispered. "We—we are God's anointed! Not working altogether for Brave Eyes, y'know. Working for God! His world. Caretakers. Nice world, what? Pity to let madmen wipe it out."

The wind ripped trenches in the coverlet of smoke that pressed upon the river. There came glimpses of the banks. The youth held himself ready to submerge. There would be watchers.

The current swung him by a high bluff. Through the smoke appeared a figure. Quick was the fellow on the bluff. He fired from the hip. A bullet hot as hell struck the collar-bone of the youth as he submerged—a bullet driving downward. . . . At times the youth lost consciousness. He imagined that he was speaking with the lean-faced man who had escaped from the evil cluster. He told him how Brave Eyes had once visited him when he was ill and had begged

a promise. Would he, the youth, please remember that he was of great value to his country, and for that reason would he take care of himself? The chief had asked that.

The lean-faced man recounted a similar happening. What the devil more could men ask in the way of compliment? What were medals, titles, maudlin write-ups by hysterical journalists? Those things were for fools who paraded their deeds before the eyes of old women, but the men who worked under the old chief were not known to the public. They themselves were nameless. Sometimes when they died, as the lean-faced rider had died, their government disowned them—scouted the insinuation that it had employed them! But in the heart of the old chief those brave dead had a shrine. Those eyes of frosted jade softened when he thought of their passing. That was their reward. That and the knowledge each had—the knowledge that he had carried the torch.

MILES below the flaming reed-bed the youth dragged himself from the river. He was weak from loss of blood; the wound brought him exquisite agony. Yet he had to go on. He and the lean-faced one had to go on.

There was a veiled moon. By its light he pulled himself across fields till he came to a highroad. He found a sign-post and studied it intently. Eleven miles away, in a side-street of a town, was a man who also worked under the direction of the old chief. He would take charge of the whip. But—eleven miles with a bullet in his lung!

A car swung down the road. The youth plunged into a ditch. In amazement he stared at the machine as it came to a halt before the sign-post. It was filled with police. Seven, eight, nine of them. The moonbeams glinted on their caps.

The driver of the car swung a searchlight on the sign-post. The youth flat-



From a dark doorway opposite Scarface's hiding-place a foot policeman rushed to the rider.

tened himself, held his breath. They were talking of some one who had escaped. They thought the escapee had been wounded. That was the general belief. His capture was deemed of such importance that the authorities had offered an enormous reward. The occupants of the car mouthed the figures of the reward—cried them aloud hungrily, whimpered strangely as the numerals fell from their lips.

The car surged forward. Astounded by the sum offered for his capture, the youth stroked the whip. What was this he carried? What extraordinary warning to the world? The stupid sleeping world that had no knowledge of the devil's brew that was being manufactured in the wastes!

Dragging himself out of the ditch, he wondered if Brave Eyes knew at that moment that he, the youth, was playing the leading rôle. He thought the dead man who rode like a centaur whispered the answer. Of course the old chief knew! Brave Eyes had picked him, the youth, for the second link in the chain that was to relay the information. "I," said the whispering dead, "was Number One in the chain, and you were Number Two! An honor for one so young. But he made no blunder in picking you! He knew you had guts! Good kid! Hell! You can crawl eleven miles! *Crawl!*"

FIVE hours later the youth dragged himself beneath a balcony in a side-street. He was all in. With difficulty he found sufficient breath to whistle the *Habañera* from "*Carmen*." He whistled it softly, ever so softly. He had dropped to his knees, unable to stand.

A window on the second floor was pushed up silently. A head was thrust out. The youth made a queer clucking sound.

The man at the window wasted no time. He climbed out, clutched an iron down-pipe and slid to the ground. He bent over the youth, who had now collapsed completely.

Hurriedly the man who had descended uncorked a flask and pressed the neck of it between the lips of the youth. A police whistle sounded in a cross-street. It was answered by another. Still another thrust a fierce needle of noise into the night.

It was the sound made by the whistles that brought the youth out of the fainting-spell. His fingers clawed madly at the whip knotted around his neck. He

thrust it at the other. Half-choked words came from his lips. A thousand police were alert. They had trailed him to the town. They were close. So close. No, no, nothing could be done for his wound! He was through! Quite! Dead in an hour! Didn't matter! He would be with the chap who rode like a centaur. They would stay with the whip! *Their souls! Go! . . . Go!*

TALLER, stronger, a few years older than the youth was the man who now took up the task of relaying the whip to the old chief.

He had a scar on his right cheek, a scar he cursed because it made a police description so easy to follow. During the period he had occupied the room in the side-street he had mapped out the best possible get-away in case he had an impulse to remove himself hurriedly. The impulse was upon him now.

The street was an *impasse*. He ran swiftly to a wall at the closed end, vaulted it, dropped into a garden which he crossed with a sureness that hinted at previous surveys. He swung himself onto a footbridge that spanned a lane, raced across a dark park, and stepped cautiously into a crooked side-street.

There was no one in sight, but in the moment he stood to examine the street, he was made aware of the devilish activity of the police. Their whistles were purple threads in the night. Clinging to the shadows, the man with the scar on his cheek fled along the sidewalk.

The street joined a parental thoroughfare, broad and well-lighted. Scar-face knew that if he could cross this street in safety, he would reach a lane that led to the railway station. A freight train lumbered through the town a few minutes before midnight. He could steal aboard the train.

But invisible hands held him as he made to cross the street. What did the youth say? That he and another would stay with the whip! *Their souls!* Startled, strangely thrilled, he stayed in the shadow. The street was a trap. Secretly alive!

The suspicions were swiftly confirmed. A mounted trooper came at a gallop over the cobblestones, and from a dark doorway immediately opposite the hiding-place of Scar-face, a foot policeman rushed and shouted information to the rider. They had got the youth, according to the foot policeman. . . . He had put up a fight. . . . The police had killed

him, but the thing, the thing they searched for, was not on the body.

Scar-face whispered a prayer for the soul of the youth. The boy in his dying moments had put up a fight. Put up a



They had got the youth, said the policeman — but the thing they searched for was not on him.

fight so that he, Scar-face, might have a better chance to escape! He touched the whip, which he had thrust within his jacket. It seemed as if he was touching the hands of those two who had brought it to him. Brave devils! The prayer became a trifle blasphemous as he thought of the manner in which they had been killed.

The foot policeman rushed back to his doorway. Scar-face was certain that there were many of his ilk in the shadows of the street. Spiders mouthing the figures of the reward!

A TWO-HORSE wagon came at a trot up the thoroughfare. A loud-voiced countryman who had stayed drinking at a café was making for his home in the outskirts.

Scar-face watched the approach of the wagon. It was on his side of the street. A whispered suggestion came to him—came to him from the whip. A strange chill ran through him. The whip—at least he thought it was the whip—had suggested that he could board the wagon as it lumbered by. When it came between him and the hidden policeman, he could scramble up the side of it and hide against the bags that formed the load!

He timed it accurately. Bending low, he slipped across the sidewalk, rode the flying spokes of the rear wheel and drove head foremost into the sacks of dried peas. He burrowed under them till he feared suffocation.

Fifty yards beyond the spot where he had boarded the wagon, another policeman stepped from the shadows and called a challenge to the driver. The wagoner jerked his horses back on their haunches. Scar-face clutched the butt of an automatic. Surely he had been seen. Surely.

The policeman approached leisurely. He spoke a dialect peculiar to the district. He said all hell had broken loose. Did the wagoner know? They had filled two thieves with lead, but the third had got away. The reward was great. Mother of God, how sweet it would be to get it! What one could do with it. Wine, women, long sprawling days in the sunshine. Drooling, he went back to the shadows and the wagoner drove on.

Scar-face thrust his hand within his jacket and stroked the whip. He speculated as to its value. Enormous! Two men had died for it; and he, Scar-face, was in danger of meeting the same fate.

The old chief had evidently pulled off a *coup*.

He thrilled as he thought of Brave Eyes. When Scar-face had received the slash on the cheek,—the slash that he cursed because it made a description so easy,—the old chief, at great danger to himself, had traveled five hundred miles to visit him. Scar-face was filled with a dreadful fear that his beloved superior would decide that the disfigurement had automatically thrust him out of the service, but his fears were groundless. In a quiet voice Brave Eyes had said that he was rather glad, because the distinctive mark on the face might prevent his subordinate from exhibiting the reckless bravery that he had shown in the past! Quietly, smiling at Scar-face, he had delivered the compliment. Scar-face had wept.

The wagon swung out of the town into a country road. A trooper rode out from the shadow of a tree and called a halt. The driver talked. He hadn't seen a thing. He had kept his eyes peeled too.

Their thick tongues repeated the figures of the reward. The trooper had hopes. He had a good description of the fellow. Tall, strong, right cheek slashed from cheekbone to chin.

"If I got the reward," said the trooper, and he flung some fine blasphemy into the possibility, "I would go to some place where they never had a war!"

THE wagoner laughed. "There's no such place now," he cried. "There's fighting everywhere. If I got the money, I would buy some up-to-date machinery, fix up the farmhouse and get married. I know a girl! Plump! Hair like flax! Oh, *Jesu!*" The vision made him lose his temper. He slashed viciously at the horses and drove on.

Other troopers rode out from dark places and halted the driver. Four of them. Each told what he would do with the reward. The wagoner held to the buying of machinery and the acquisition of the plump wife. Scar-face, listening intently, thought that he already knew the young lady.

The last trooper to hail the wagon agreed with the marriage idea. This communion of thought made the fellow ride beside the vehicle till it turned from the roadside into a filthy farmyard.

A huge yokel welcomed the wagoner. The vehicle was driven into a barn. The two men talked in low voices as they

unhitched the horses. Scar-face could not hear their words. He waited anxiously for them to leave the place.

They walked together to the door, turned—and suddenly rushed the wagon. With surprising agility they sprang into it. A pitchfork, driven with tremendous strength, missed the ribs of Scar-face by a matter of inches. The tines drove through the sleeve of his coat, pinning him for the moment to a bag of dried peas. It was clear that the wagoner at some period of the journey had divined the presence of the fugitive! The cunning devil had talked to the troopers to lull the suspicions of his passenger!

The big farmhand, swinging a mattock, aimed a blow at the head of Scar-face. The latter shifted his head in time to prevent it from being pulverized. The bag of dried peas received the blow, and the shower of hard pellets half blinded the mattock-wielder.

Scar-face slipped his arm from the pinned sleeve and gripped the ankle of the wagoner. He gave it a mighty jerk, and the fellow went backward, rolled over the tailboard of the wagon and struck the stone floor of the barn. He lay there groaning.

On his knees now, Scar-face dodged another awkward blow aimed by the giant, pulled his pistol and fired blindly. The bullet clipped the lobe from the left ear of the fellow. He screamed with pain, dropping the mattock. The heavy weapon came down upon the right ankle of Scar-face. The bone snapped! The pain was intense. . .

The giant touched his ear and stared at his bloodstained hands. The sight of blood hypnotized him, and before he could recover from the fear, Scar-face took control. The snout of the pistol was thrust into the stomach of the farmhand; orders were snapped at him.

He was to climb down from the wagon and truss up his half-stunned master. The ever-following snout of the pistol quickened his actions as he fumbled with ropes.

The farmer, returning to consciousness, cursed fluently as the cord enveloped him. Scar-face ordered a gag, and the giant used half a saddlecloth.

SCAR-FACE inquired the distance to a certain town. The giant thought it fourteen miles from the farm. That was by the main road. There was a track through the woods used by game-wardens. A mile or so shorter.

The broken ankle brought exquisite agony, but the whip possessed some strange antidote to pain. The whip and the souls of those two who rode with it! The automatic waved the giant to the side of the wagon. He was ordered to turn his back. A cold ring of steel touched his neck as Scar-face, with gritted teeth, climbed on the fellow's back.

HIS instructions were simple, amazingly simple. The giant was to take his mount to the town by the path through the woods. The glimpse of a policeman would make the pistol send a bullet into the fellow's spine.

They moved out of the barn, bolting the door on the outside. From the roadway came the sound of galloping hoofs. Troopers.

The farmhand followed a narrow path that led down a hill at the rear of the farmhouse. Dim in the light of the veiled moon. The track crossed a plowed field and ran straight into the heart of the woods beyond.

The joggling of the broken ankle was not pleasant, but the whip helped to blot out the pain—the whip and those two who had died. They commended the quick come-back after Fate had rocked Scar-face. He was pleased.

He calculated the speed of his "horse." With luck he should reach the town at sunrise. A rather awkward time. In this town there was a certain café, and that café was visited at odd hours by a person who was also in the employ of the old chief. Whether the person was male or female, young or old, Scar-face did not know.

Would this person be there at an early hour? That question troubled him. Of course the unusual happenings in the countryside might make the café visitor visualize unexpected developments. There was a hope.

Tirelessly the giant farmhand plodded through the woods. Twice he lost the trail and found it again. Now and then he begged nervously for a rest, but Scar-face drove him forward. The giant was paying for the murderous swipes he had made with the mattock.

Toward dawn it commenced to rain. Scar-face questioned his "mount." The track approached a small wagon-trail. The farmhand thought that the town was not more than half a mile distant. Scattered houses, half visible in the mist, supported his assertion.

Scar-face steered his bearer into a

copse. He slipped from the fellow's back, with difficulty controlling a cry of agony. He ordered the farmhand to back up against a young sapling. The fellow did so. Scar-face, using his own belt and one worn by the giant, tied him up securely; then, clawing himself into a standing position by means of the other's clothes, he gagged him. Satisfied with his work, he crawled on hands and knees to the road. He had to enter the town by other means than the back of a person who was aware of his identity.

HE crouched by the side of the track. A milk-cart from the country approached, the cans banging noisily. Scar-face crawled into the roadway and shouted to the driver. He begged a ride to the town. He had injured his leg.

The milkman was churlish, suspicious, afraid. Scar-face offered money; the fellow relented. He climbed down and assisted the injured man into the cart. Where would he drive him? Scar-face gave the name of the café. It was his only hope. The "Some one" might be there. Of his own safety he cared little, but the whip with its secret knowledge had to go on. The whip was worth a thousand lives. He stroked it to assure it of his devotion. . . .

They reached the café. The little street was empty save for a humpbacked employee who was beating rugs on the sidewalk. Scar-face called him to his assistance. The humpback helped him down and half carried him into the place. There were no clients.

Scar-face ordered a glass of spirits. He drank it greedily. What the devil was to be done now? If the farmhand was found in the field, he would tell everything. It would be a question of hours, of minutes perhaps, when Scar-face would be tracked down. And if the "Some one" did not arrive?

Three carters came in for coffee. Scar-face softly whistled the Habañera. One could never tell. Clever was the old chief, devilishly clever. But the carters took no notice of him. They swilled their drink with much noise and went out. The humpback washed their glasses. Once he turned and looked at the pain-racked face of Scar-face. He asked nervously if his client wished to see a doctor. The client snapped at him. A doctor? Hell, no!

Two more carters came in. Evidently the markets were near by. Three more.

Then a postman, a street-cleaner, a tramp. Four more carters. The eyes of Scar-face went over them anxiously. He continued to whistle softly. The strain was terrible. The life of the town was waking up now. He wondered if the farmhand had attracted the attention of a passer-by. The big giant was strong enough to tear the sapling up by the roots. Scar-face cursed himself for not taking him deeper into the woods before tying him up. It might have been wiser to have shot him.

A policeman entered the café, a big, bearded man. He sauntered to the bar, ordered a hot drink, then carried the glass to a small table close to the one at which Scar-face was seated. Three minutes later a man in civilian clothes joined the policeman. They thrust their heads together and talked in whispers.

A woman came through the swinging doors—a girl, rather. She was tall, blonde and good-looking. In the early twenties. There was a certain distinction about her. She ordered milk and sat to drink it at a table immediately opposite Scar-face.

The whispering policeman and his friend upset Scar-face. He was fearful for the safety of the whip. Hope was dying with each moment that passed. He had a horror that the pain from his ankle would make him faint. He steeled himself against the possibility.

Again he softly whistled the Habañera. He had a belief that Brave Eyes knew of his plight. Surely. The old chief had an uncanny knowledge of what was happening. Of course he knew. He would be moving heaven and earth to help his injured subordinate. Brave Eyes would know that the broken ankle was not the fault of his agent. He would know that.

THE gaze of Scar-face drifted lazily over the girl as he whistled. Then his heart gave a lurch and nearly choked him. A wild blood-scurry possessed him. For the girl had taken a handkerchief from her pocket and carelessly wiped her eyes!

The tune died. It was unbelievable! Craftily he glanced at her again. Once more the handkerchief went to her eyes! *She was the "Some-one!"* The some one who visited the café at certain hours! Her presence spelled salvation. Not for him! No, no! For the whip!

He must let the girl see that he was crippled. Cunningly he did so. She

The girl set her jaw as the machine roared down upon the mounted trooper. . . . The horse gave a mighty leap, and the trooper struck madly at her with his sword.



rose with the evident intention of seeking a journal that was on the rack above his head, but at that moment the swinging doors were thrust violently open. Into the café tramped a lieutenant of police, accompanied by the milkman who had given Scar-face the ride!

The frightened milkman pointed a stubby forefinger at his early-morning passenger. The officer screamed an or-

der. The big bearded policeman and the man in plain-clothes rushed at Scar-face.

A tactician was Scar-face. The marble table went forward! It came down upon the toes of the policeman. A double brandy, hurled accurately, blinded the eyes of the plain-clothes man. A bullet broke the wrist of the officer, who was slow on the draw. Scar-face had dropped

to the floor, crouching behind the up-turned table. In confusion there was hope.

The barkeeper hurled a bottle. Another and another. Scar-face ducked. A heavy chair flung by a porter caught him a sideswipe that nearly downed him. His eyes sought the girl. She was there—watching, taut, eager. He thought she understood his tactics. In a scrimmage there would be a chance. A chance for her to seize the whip. He thought she knew now that it was the whip that had to be saved. Not himself! No, no. He had held his hand to his jacket when she had stood up.

A heavy tumbler struck him on the forehead. Blood poured down his face. He managed to wing the brute who flung the missile. Then they rushed—seven of them. He was buried under their sweaty bodies. They were screaming information to each other. The figures of the reward. Two of the fellow's friends had been killed; the authorities wanted him badly.

HOLDING a faint spark of consciousness in the grip of his will power, Scar-face struggled. The girl—the girl! Where was she? In the swarm of big hairy paws that grabbed at him, he waited for her fingers.

They were there. A hand shot between the legs of a brute kneeling on him. The hand of a conjuror—a deft, searching hand. It was in his jacket. It clasped something. He rolled to give it cover. He felt a sudden emptiness. A strange withdrawal of power, of force; and yet with that withdrawal came a divine thrill that lifted him. Lifted him to the stars! The butt of a revolver crashed on his head as he made a final effort to help her retreat. He lay quiet with ten men sprawled on him. . . .

This girl was a special pet of the man with the eyes of frosted jade. She was young, but she had high courage born of generations of splendid ancestors. The men and women of her race had carefully expelled fear from their blood. They had cultivated a cold stoicism in the face of death and disaster, a stoicism that seemed at times to become an invisible shield. Once the family of the girl had possessed immense wealth. Palaces had been theirs, but the war had ruined them. She had applied to the old chief for work. Her knowledge of half a dozen languages got her a post. . . .

Free of the crowded café, this girl dashed up a little side-street to a shed where she had left a motorcycle. Beneath her short skirt she wore riding pants.

Quickly, yet without showing her taut nerves, she mounted and swung down a sloping road that led out of the town. Her eyes swept the face of the town clock. It was six-forty-five. She had less than two hours to cover some ninety-five miles of road if she wished to intercept a person who would pass a certain point at eight-thirty.

She crouched forward and drove like a streak down the white road. She knew the obstacles in her path—the thousand and one obstacles; but she had to make that connection. The whip nestled in her bosom. She felt it. It brought wonder thoughts to her mind. Strange, thrilling thoughts.

She breathed a prayer for Scar-face. Game was Scar-face. She recalled his efforts to bring the whip to her attention, the crafty manner in which he had fought to conceal the transfer. And a prayer for the two others. The wolves had screamed of the death of two others. Souls of three were with her—within her bosom, guarding the whip. . . .

Far ahead on the white road a horseman appeared. The girl saw the glint of arms in the morning sunlight. She didn't slacken speed, but drove straight ahead in the middle of the road. This fellow on the horse wouldn't know anything about her; but if she paused, he might detain her. Well, she wasn't going to pause. She was going to go by him like a flying comet. If he pulled that great tall horse across the road in an effort to halt her, she would crouch flat and shoot under the very stomach of the horse, she determined.

THE trooper put up his hand as the machine roared down upon him; he pulled his horse sideways when he saw that the gesture was ignored. The girl headed at him, full out. She set her jaw. Would he move? He would have to! Ninety-odd miles away there was—the machine was on him! The horse gave a mighty leap. The tail of the animal slashed her face as she tore by. Something whistled close to her ear. The mean devil! He had struck madly at her with his sword. She crouched lower over the handle-bars.

She roared by country wagons. A wild exhilaration was upon her, a madness.

She knew that she was doing something extraordinary. The whip whispered to her; it tried to tell her of the struggle to reach the shelter of her white bosom. Dimly she understood. In fancy she saw the lean-faced rider flying from the evil cluster in the wilderness, and the splendid youth who crawled miles, sobbing—not from pain or terror, but with fear lest he would fall down on the assignment that had been given to him by the old chief. And the man with the scar on his cheek waiting for her at the café, fighting his last fight so gallantly!

OVER the top of a hill came a prancing company—cavalrymen, seven of them. Two and two, an officer in the lead. The girl drove up the hill, her shattering roar going out before her, setting the overfed horses caracoling. She grinned as she glimpsed them. Horses were out of date. This was a mechanized age. She'd show them.

The fool officer at the head of the company lifted a sword—lifted it as a signal to her to halt. She wanted to laugh, but she was afraid that the wind would get down her throat and choke her. A sword? The idiot! Didn't he hear the clamor that came from her? It woke the hills.

She would spill them in the ditch. Four on one side and three on the other. An old rhyme came to her mind: "*Going to St. Ives, I met seven wives.*" These were the seven. Old wives with old-fashioned swords telling her to stop! Each wife had a hoss that she straddled across! *Whoof!* She was crashing down upon them! Which way would the officer go? Left or right? *Eeny, meeny, miny, mo!*

The officer went to the right—at least, his horse did. The animal tried to jump the ditch, floundered into it and spilled his rider. The girl had a flying vision of highly polished patent-leather boots pointed skyward. One of the six threw a sword at her. Threw it!

She wanted gas. Her iron machine was thirsty. She chose an out-of-the-way station and slowed down.

A tall, good-looking youngster came out and smiled at her. What could he do? He asked if she had a permit. No? Well, he just couldn't give her any gas. Why? Well, he had got orders from the cavalry commander. Had she seen the cavalry commander on the road? Every person wanting gas had to have a police order.

The girl smiled sweetly. The cavalry commander hadn't told her that. Had she spoken to him? Had she not? Why, one of his men wanted to give her a sword. Begged her to take it along. The commander had admired her riding.

The youth was impressed. She sidled alongside him. She touched his big hand. He flushed. She whispered of her errand. She was going to buy clothes for her wedding! *Yes, her wedding!*

His blush deepened. She had been so excited when talking to the cavalry commander that she hadn't asked the idiot for a permit. Just a little gas. No one need ever know. Her breath was on his cheek.

She kissed the youth before she mounted. A half-mile beyond the station she turned her head and glanced back. He was still staring after her. . . .

Gobbling up the leagues now. Milestones rushing into each other's arms, seemingly. Her heart beating fast, pounding against the whip. The whip that was guarded by the souls of men who had died to bring it to her.

Nearing the end of her journey now. Well within the time-limit, too! A great feeling of joy spread over her. Another five miles, and she would come to a quiet lane leading westward. She would follow this lane for some three quarters of a mile to a point where a big pine-tree stood alone on a sandy slope. If the pine-tree held a stone in the fork made by the first limb, the person she sought was still in the vicinity and it was only a question of minutes or hours when he would make a visit to the tree. If there was no stone in the fork, he had departed.

SHE visualized the fork of the pine-tree as she slowed down to glance at a milestone. She visualized the face of the man who would be waiting there; then, with a little cry of horror, she crouched low and dashed forward. Out of the shadow thrown by a clump of brush flashed a motorcycle policeman! A fellow with a voice like a trumpet, who called upon her to stop.

The girl didn't stop. She drove ahead at full speed. The thunder of her pursuer rolled over her—rolled over her in such volume that the explosions of her own machine seemed but a faint susurration in comparison. This devil's tattoo rose louder. It fed upon her courage, fed on her hopes. It crept like a cold hand into her bosom where nestled the

whip, the whip for which three men had died!

The lane rushed toward her. She took it in a manner that startled her—banned crazily.

He was gaining on her. She prayed, prayed to the three. The roar of his machine beat upon her courage.

A pinch of sand was flung up far ahead of her machine. He was firing at her! She bent low. The top of the lonely pine showed ahead. The pine waved to her, encouraged her.

Another shot from her pursuer. Her nerves were going. She avoided a crash by a miracle.

A third bullet struck the handle-bar. He was trying to kill her. She pictured him kneeling over her, thrusting his grimy hand into her bosom. Impossible! There—there with the whip were the souls of the three!

The pine flamed before her. It might—it might be possible that he—that he would be there waiting! Sometimes miracles happened.

Something stung her just above the elbow, stung her viciously. She wabbed. A sudden sickness overcame her. The machine swerved.

As she lost control, she saw some one rise from the brush at the base of the pine—some one a thousand feet high, so she thought. An arm, tremendous in its length, was flung out. There was a flash of fire, a yell from behind her; then her own machine drove into a sand-bank, and everything was dark.

WHEN the girl came to her senses, she looked up into eyes that were frosted jade. He had bandaged her arm where the bullet had struck her. He was murmuring comforting words.

She laughed hysterically, thrust her left hand into her bosom and pushed the whip at him. She continued to laugh, crazily.

Like a man suddenly controlled by a great and sublime terror lest something he wishes will not be realized although within sight, the man grasped the whip. Slowly, ever so slowly, as if afraid that a quick movement would destroy the thing, he seized the handle and twisted it slightly.

Another turn, then another, slowly. The handle came apart, disclosing an aperture. The man thrust a groping forefinger within. He brought out a tightly rolled sheet of yellow paper—thin paper, very thin. It clung to his

fingers as he unrolled it. It seemed alive, fearful that it might be snatched from his hand by a prowling wind.

It was covered with symbols, strange symbols. The eyes of cold jade stared at the symbols, and his lips moved without making a sound. The girl thought he was praying. Yes, he was surely praying.

THE room had character. It was a room in which matters of tremendous import to the world had been discussed. At the great mahogany table sat seven men. They whispered amongst themselves, and watched a baize door at the end of the room.

The baize door swung inward, and two men entered. The first was a short man with a leonine head; the other was tall, and he had eyes like frosted jade. The seven at the big table rose and bowed.

When they were again seated, the man with the leonine head spoke. In a half-whisper he explained. Something, something of the greatest importance, had come into his possession. He had called them together immediately because—because steps had to be taken without delay.

He paused, leaned across the table and spoke in a whisper. "*Steps to save our country from utter annihilation,*" he said slowly. "*Our country and the world!*"

There was a pause, a choking silence. From the attaché-case in front of him he drew a sheet of yellow paper and eight white sheets. "This is the original," he said, tapping the yellow paper. "It is in cipher. There is a translation for each."

Into the room crept a tremendous quiet. Seven pairs of eyes ate up the words on the white sheets before them. The minutes took on the slow pomposity of hours.

The short man with the leonine head silently put forth a hand and gripped the hand of the old chief. He held it for a long while. He could not speak the words of praise that came to his lips.

Suddenly the frosted eyes were moistened. Their owner was looking at a corner of the big room. He thought three men stood there. A lean-faced devil who laughed at death, a youth of high courage, and a tall man whose cheek was sliced from eye to chin. They were surely there. He tried to smile at them. Ever so softly, he spoke their names.

The dark story of that now classic battle between the Bessemer Bearcat and the mysterious unknown called the Masked Mauler.

By
**ARTHUR
K. AKERS**

Illustrated by
Everett Lowry



"Lie dat over again, runt; and lie it slow,"
snapped his chief.

The Masked Mauler

"IS dat little runt Asbestos Dunn wrop a mess of cuss-words round your ears, Bugwine, or is he aint?" demanded Columbus Collins pointedly, as the door of the Columbus Collins detective agency (for colored) slammed angrily from without, and Assistant-sleuth "Bugwine" Breck descended feebly from a wardrobe-top within.

"Asbestos cravin' service too quick," defended the five-foot Mr. Breck groggily. "He so jealous of dat high-yaller wife Annabelle of his'n, what he retained me to watch, dat he wants me to sprain a lung gittin' to him to report it every time I see a boy struttin' de same street wid her."

"And is a client like Asbestos, what's got ten dollars to pay us off wid as soon as you catches who Annabelle been step-pin' out wid, crave speed, *speed* is what he gits!" retorted his chief conclusively. "Also, who you think is payin' de rent round here—Santa Claus? Landlord says us pays up tonight or gits out to-morrer—he so hongry he's gnawin' his knees."

The blue-overalled Bugwine continued to eye mournfully the dodgers for an imminent darky heavyweight championship bout—and the agency's equally dark outlook for rent and rations if Asbestos

didn't get service. But— "Aint locate nobody to hang it on, yit!" he croaked despairingly.

Then his attention was distracted.

"Who dat comin' here *now*?" Columbus questioned sharply, following his gaze.

"Aint know. Sho is big!" Bugwine's mind was busy with his own record: dissatisfied clients always had to be the husky ones!

BUT the newcomer left them in no lingering uncertainty. "De Bessemer Bearcat," he introduced himself breezily. "Takes on all comers! Er—is anybody listenin'?"

"All cases confidential," recited Columbus, reassured and reassuringly. "You can talk free here, Mist' Bearcat. Bugwine, unlock de bloodhound!"

"Leave him locked; job's for brains," demurred the stranger.

"Dust off de brains, Bugwine! Client fixin' to confide." Mr. Collins' idea of an assistant continued to be that of some one to holler at.

"I is de leadin' heavyweight of Bessemer and points west—fur as Blocton," resumed the Bearcat modestly. "And needin' protection, is how-come I come here."

The adenoidal Bugwine's memory came out of moth-balls with a rush: this was the boy, then, that those dodgers were advertising! To meet the mysterious "Masked Mauler" of Indiana in the cement-works arena for the heavy-weight colored championship of the canebrake country this very night. "Protection from *what*?" he puzzled; surely only a landslide could threaten such a mountain of a man!

"From my manager—little shrimp by name 'Pony-horse' Wheeler."

"From your *manager*?" Columbus re-entered the conversation by the simple device of laying a large palm heavily upon the face of his aide, and pushing.

THE BEARCAT shifted embarrassedly. "Yeah, and also no," he qualified. "You sees, I can't meet dis Masked Mauler, becaze I *knows* him."

"Means you can't fight a boy you knows?"

"Trouble is, he knows *me*, too."

"What dat got to do wid it?" Mr. Collins remained puzzled.

"W-e-l-l,"—cross-examination showed results at last,—"you sees, I borrsers dis Mauler's car, up in Indiana a couple of weeks ago; and forgits to tell him about it. Den I gits messed up wid a truck in it—on account of two gals what was helpin' me drive it—and old Mauler finds out about it when dey uncrumples de license-plates and phones him to come git de wreck."

"So you means de Mauler is sore at you, and aimin' to git even?"

"Wid sashweights in both gloves!" confirmed the Bearcat fervently. "Be one of dem grudge-fights right! Dat how-come I needs protection from Pony-horse, he in sich a sweat to put on de bout when he hear about it."

"To git you killed?"

"Naw, to git in on de big gate-money a grudge-fight always fatches. And—and I got to git dis fight stopped, widout nobody knowin' I put you up to it."

Sleuth looked at sleuth. Here *was* dirty work to be done at the crossroads!

"Puts up five bucks down," the Bessemerite here improved the outlook for their landlord. "—And five more, and expenses, *when* de fight is over and I wins it by default."

Being fast on his feet, Bugwine was not injured in the rush. But Columbus emerged with the bill.

"Puts our best man on it, Mist' Bearcat!" as he cached it. "Mist' Breck here

is in charge de agency's prize-fight fixin' department. Always gits his man."

"Fight's due for eight tonight," reminded the client. "Got to work fast."

But a moment later, with the Bearcat gone, graciousness was too. "Muff dis one, and you gits yourself a glass gizzard—account of what I done to your regular one!" Columbus thrust his face down close to his worried aide's. "Landlord fixin' throw us out for de rent; and you got *two* cases now—aint doin' no good yit wid either of 'em. Craves from you more action and less dumbness!"

Mr. Breck's sauced eyes revolved helplessly. "Cain't locate no boy what's been steppin' out wid Annabelle. Besides, how *I* gwine bust up no fight between dem two big boys tonight?" he summarized. "Bearcat says hisself dat Mauler aint nothin' but a itch to git at him, account dat car business."

"You got to fix dat fight so it aint *look* fixed, too." Mr. Collins went on, paying no attention to this puzzle. "Elsewise you wins a race from about nine hundred customers and a whole mess of seconds and managers."

"What dat Masked Mauler look like?" Bugwine fumbled around the edge of his task.

"Like a truck wid pants on. And he aint so dumb, neither: gits in a town and lays low; den, at de last minute, when everybody wonderin' whar is he, here he come, boundin' down de aisle wid his mask on, and hollerin'! Last year in Gawgia he skeered two fighters plumb into de ocean before dey could head 'em off, doin' dat."

"What's his right name?" Mr. Breck's eyes were fast getting into the acreage class.

"Aint matter: you's skeered enough now. But bust up dat fight or I busts up *you*!"

BUGWINE'S mental travail brought forth an idea. "Slip me dat five—for expense-money," he displayed it for adoption. "Liable to have to work fast."

Columbus couldn't find fault with this idea, even though it was Bugwine's. But, "Blow dat five in around no poolroom *widout* fixin' de fight," he warned, "and you got me and de Bearcat *both* to outrun, if you lives!"

Once outside, however, Mr. Breck found his territory circumscribed by the fact that the peppery little Asbestos was jealously combing Hogan's Alley in person for signs of the unidentified boy-



"From your *manager*?" Columbus reëntered the conversation by the simple device of laying a large palm heavily on the face of his aide, and pushing.

friend with whom his wife Annabelle had been rendering him ridiculous: the one Bugwine couldn't find.

So Bugwine shifted to Strawberry Street: any time he faced Asbestos henceforth, without results in both hands, it would be an accident.

But everywhere, everything was the same: not a new face, form, or factor in all the familiar scene.

Then Mr. Breck started, rubbed his eyes, and in one inspired instant perceived that all had changed, dating from his first glimpse of a breath-taking figure which stood ponderously before the Sweet Papa barbershop. The Masked Mauler might be as big as a truck, but *this* stranger was as big as a house! Which was all the better. For the plan Bugwine had conceived on sight of him was no job for shrimps!

Forthwith, and as nonchalantly as his inner seethings would permit, Mr. Breck re-hoisted his overalls and sauntered across the way. "Stranger around here?" his question combined inquiry, promise, and the opening of delicate negotiations—plus a glimpse of his pan-sized tin star.

"In a way, Sheriff—in a way," rumbled the big unknown good-humoredly. "Drops into town to let de womenfolks *here* have a treat too. Works fast wid 'em, everywhar."

Bugwine lapped up the flattery of that term *Sheriff* with such gusto that his

ears got splashed. "Sho aint nobody stopped you when you took de notion to grow up!" he in turn voiced a worm's-eye view of tonnage-on-the-hoof.

"Gives de gals more to look at! But sounds like leadin' up to a loan—"

Mr. Breck flashed his five. "Instead of dat," he countered, "I is lookin' for somebody big as you is to hire for a little job of work. Make dis five in about four minutes—"

"Dat's my regular hours and wages—in advance. What de job?"

"Craves to git a boy beat up."

"And I hires easy!" the stranger was already shucking his coat, reaching for the money. "Conscious or unconscious?" he further desired, deferentially and in the manner of a waiter regarding the cooking of a steak.

"For five bucks, craves him hospitaled copious," Bugwine sought his client's money's worth. "So he cain't git around good for a week."

"When I fixes 'em, dey cain't tell whether to send for 'em wid a ambulance or a hearse," the new employee endorsed himself. "Women sho flocks to watch me work, too. What's de—uh—name and address?"

"Aint know—yit. Dey calls him de 'Masked Mauler.' He's comin' here to fight tonight at de cement-works ring—only he aint. Dat *aint* is yo' job, for de Bearcat—"

"Bearcat? *Masked Mauler?* Huh?" The stranger seemed suddenly disturbed.

"Forgits tellin' you. All you got to do is keep lookin' till you finds him. Den cripple him, and you gits *another* five from me. So busy I forgits."

"*Another* five?" The behemoth seemed further torn between conflicting trains of thought at each new angle revealed.

"Sho! Picks you for de job prompt—and gits eve'ything but yo' name."

"Name's Kokomo. Kokomo Anderson. But de middle name is *Service!*"

BACK at the agency's headquarters in Hogan's Alley, Bugwine re-checked business and found it flawless. Even the behemothian Kokomo's slight disconcertion at learning whom he was to massacre was but natural. Hiring easily, as he himself admitted, impulsiveness was bound to produce momentary regrets upon learning that his victim was to be the Mauler. The Mauler was no toy, even for a steam-shovel. But the big point was that Kokomo was hired, and partially paid, in advance. Proving further that Bugwine was not the total loss, mentally, that Columbus ever contended.

"Uh-huh! Back again, without solvin' nothin', is you?" rasped Mr. Collins.

"Back wid everything 'tended to, you means," corrected Bugwine expansively.

Columbus started. "Means you solves Asbestos case 'bout Annabelle?" hope dared down, ten dollars' worth.

"Cain't locate dat boy," Mr. Breck's triumph got diluted, then strengthened with: "Means I hired a boy big as a house to beat up de Masked Mauler so he cain't git in de ring tonight. Fixes eve'ything, wid my brains—and de Bearcat's five."

Mr. Collins tried to look unimpressed, but failed. "Sometimes," he grudgingly bestowed praise where praise was due on the face of things, "you is got as much sense as a fourteen-year-old boy—what was drapped on his head at two. What de name of who you hires to mess up de Mauler?"

"Knows dat too!" Bugwine was not only good but admitted it. "Name's Kokomo Anderson. Middle name's 'Service,' he say."

"Koko—Koko— Huh?" Columbus was having some sort of seizure.

"Koko Anderson," repeated Mr. Breck proudly. Brains would tell!

At this, however, Mr. Collins was released from his spell—only to fall instantly into a far fouler one. He leaped

from the floor and raised his fists high above his head, that he might bring them down in gestures of mingled wrath, disgust, and abject despair.

"*Yeah!* Bright in de head!" he howled. "Fixes eve'ything—wid your brains! Boy, all *you* does is fix eve'ything nine times wuss dan it was before! De name of de Masked Mauler is Kokomo Anderson!"

The floor came up to meet Bugwine as his legs looped under him. A glassy look dulled both his eyes, and mercifully prevented his seeing the worst too rapidly. "You—you means," he struggled, "dat I done hired de Masked Mauler to beat *hisself* up?"

"Wid de Bearcat's money," Columbus calmed to mere cyclonic proportions, "you hires de Marvel to lick *hisself!* And tells *him* dat de Bearcat put you up to it!"

Mr. Breck wavered, gurgled, and seemed busy swallowing his own neck.

"What Asbestos say to you about not cotchin' Annabelle's boy-friend aint *nothin'* to what *both* dem big boys gwine do to you now," Columbus rasped again.

Bugwine saw himself riding avalanches to oblivion—and why that big stranger had been so startled when Bugwine had named him to himself as his own victim!

"—And would de Mauler want to bust up dat fight *now?*" further persisted Columbus through Bugwine's night. "All *you* is done is make him itch jest *twice* as bad to git dat Bearcat in de ring wid him tonight!"

In time, the crushed Mr. Breck was able to crawl feebly about. "Gits me a mess of air," he croaked dully as he neared the door. "Maybe come across who Annabelle been runnin' round wid."

"Asbestos done started lookin' for dat boy, *hisself*. Git yo' mind off him, and on four dollars for de landlord—is you got a mind!"

STANDING in the need of luck, Bugwine limped fruitlessly up one side of Fish Alley and down the other. Yearningly he eyed Hogan's Alley. True, it was Asbestos Dunn's private hunting-ground now; but Asbestos couldn't do any more to him now than he had done to himself—lost the jealousy-case and ruined the fight-fixing one.

Shuffling dispiritedly into the forbidden thoroughfare, Mr. Breck surveyed the newer scene. Across the way squatted the dingy front of the Waldorf-As-

toria Hotel (Demopolis edition) for Colored. And, remembering that the hotel's coffee and chili were warranted to restore the weakest in brain or body, Bugwine reached for its doorknob—while his guardian angel reached for the arnica!

For within, Mr. Breck encountered his disconcerting employee, Kokomo Anderson. "Jest lettin' de women look at me—and waitin' round for dat boy to pass what you hires me to cripple," Mr. Anderson greeted his employer's entry. "I hires easy, but hospitalizes rough!"

Bugwine's brain ground painfully on freshly sanded bearings: Adding Columbus' revelation to Kokomo's comment was a sure way to get cuckoo: for how could a boy wait for himself to pass? But in the ensuing fog one fact began to stand out—Hogan's Alley was no place for Mr. Breck to be when Kokomo the fixer attacked himself as the Masked Mauler!

Yet, as he turned to go, Kokomo's hand fell on his shoulder, pinning him in his tracks, while in his ear hissed an eager: "*Look! Who dat comin'?*"

Bugwine's unhappy gaze followed a banana-sized forefinger to the latter's objective—Annabelle Dunn, strolling along the opposite sidewalk in all the demure allure of a good-looker who knows that her jealous husband is not far behind. As indeed Asbestos was not; only two blocks behind.

"Who dat gal? How-come I miss *her*?" reiterated Mr. Anderson urgently.

"Name's Annabelle Dunn. Husband's a boy named Asbestos—"

"Aint care is he named *Fire-brick!* Got my mind on dat looker. What she needs to make her happy is to meet me!"

Mr. Breck was instantly halfway out of his restraining overalls, but the other half held him. "Dress yo'self, boy; and give dat Annabelle a break—and de high-sign!" ordered his captor joyously as he hauled in the slack of the sleuth's garb. "She knows you—and she's *fixin'* to know me!"

Bugwine gulped, glimpsed cross-sections of his own immediate future, and, "Makes you 'quainted wid her," he gurgled despairingly; "den I got to go."

"Make me 'quainted, and I aint got no notion of *lettin'* you stick around!" Kokomo revealed a different slant on the same subject.

Annabelle, it developed, was heading for chili, anyhow. A huge and handsome stranger standing just inside the hotel door constituted no drawback—not with



Asbestos Dunn, screeching like a dyspeptic wildcat, leaped for the fleeing, squalling Mr. Anderson.

an unofficial minion of the law uneasily at his elbow to make the introductions.

"Hi, Bugwine! How de crook business?" she greeted the Law informally.

"Always gits my man," mumbled Mr. Breck, confused before coming events.

"Sho is git a big one *dis* time!" Annabelle's gaze played over the man-mountain.

"Dis aint no crook," Bugwine bestirred himself feebly among the amenities. "He Mist' Kokomo Anderson, de—er—Masked Mauler tonight. He jest lookin' round—"

"Till I sees you, I is, Good-lookin', den I stops!" Mr. Anderson instantly seized for himself the dawning hero-worship in Annabelle's eyes at his introduced identity. "From now on, all I craves to know is, is you crave chili?"

Annabelle glanced fearfully backward, toward the oncoming Asbestos; hesitated, decided—and struck out for domestic equality and chili too. She and the expansive Kokomo sought a suitable table in the rear for two—and Bugwine developed business as close to New Orleans as his feet could get him in the next sixty seconds.

But he was not destined to get far. Midway in the first block, in fact, he spun about to the crash of crockery, fast-followed by the unmistakable *crack!* ever produced by one gentleman ruining a chair over the skull of another. All intermingled instantly with feminine screams, hoarse masculine shoutings, and the thud of furniture on flesh.



The Bearcat was interrupted dramatically and from the rear by an answering bellow of: "Here I is."

In a flash the halted and horrified Mr. Breck perceived all: Asbestos had jealously followed Annabelle into the hotel, her mountainous escort had resented it, and now Hogan's Alley was listening to the last muffled words of a shrimp who had attacked a heavyweight champion-to-be by mistake!

"Let old Asbestos git jealous, and he's a two-tailed tornado, all right!" obituaried the knob-eyed Mr. Breck; "but *dis* time he gwine die down to jest a little small breeze—under a tombstone, day after tomorrer."

But even as Bugwine pronounced the words, the disturbance within the Waldorf re-rose to hurricane proportions, to climax in a horrid splintering sound as seemingly half of the front elevation of the structure suddenly gave way before an awful impact from within. And through the aperture thus created shot, first, Annabelle, leaping like a young gazelle, only farther and faster! While behind her the renewed heave and crash of wrecked furniture and shattering fixtures gave proof through the noon that Kokomo was still there.

Yet at this point a totally new face was put startlingly upon affairs. What hurtled next through the new-made main exit was Asbestos and Kokomo, as expected. But what staggered Mr. Breck,

to send him reeling against a fence, was the *order* of their going. Kokomo was frenziedly in front! Not even the jealousy-born ferocity of Asbestos could explain his routing a ring champion like this.

Worse, even as Bugwine gasped and groped for light, Asbestos Dunn, screeching like a dyspeptic wildcat, leaped, table-leg in hand, for the vast back of the fleeing, squalling Mr. Anderson. There he clung, belaboring his speeding mount about the upper-works with the table-leg, at every leap.

"I'll teach you—to take my wife—into no hotel! I'll bust up dis here—steppin'-out business wid her!" howled the irate husband as his improvised flail tellingly rose and fell. "I seen Bugwine's work! And I—"

But just here Mr. Dunn's maddened mount plunged blindly through a panel of fence, a week's washing, and a sidewalk soft-drink stand, to crash then headlong into a telephone-pole—and lie twitching convulsively in a cactus-bed, while Asbestos shot off at a tangent into the gutter, with the Bessemer Bearcat briefly visible at a distance, looking bewilderedly on.

For his part, the stunned and startled Mr. Breck suddenly saw his doom. Again, in the chronic words of Columbus,

he had played hell with the bark on! In introducing Kokomo to Annabelle, right before the approaching husband's jealous eyes, he had but precipitated the upsetting of every apple-cart! Before this realization went every remaining question of how a shrimp like Asbestos could so utterly rout a fighter such as this Kokomo was known to be. Gone too was the final vestige of his former hold on Asbestos as a client. Gone was that ten-dollar fee now, his "face" with Columbus, the landlord's rent, the Bearcat's first and second five dollars—

Yet suddenly in this blackness a single scrawny bird sang of dawn for Bugwine; a single bit of wreckage floated upon the stormy waters where he had just gone down for the third time. For, it flashed over him, if in introducing Annabelle to Kokomo he had ruined himself in one case—which he had already lost—he had inadvertently *made* himself in another: if Kokomo Anderson could not beat himself up, Asbestos had done that job for him! The most cursory glance at the battered wreckage now crawling groaningly from the cactus-bed told all: Kokomo Anderson would not fight *that* night—nor for many nights to come.

"Boy, take off yo' hat to your brains!" instructed the reviving Bugwine to himself as he turned discreetly toward his headquarters. "Dey got more sense by accident, dan you is on purpose!"

But the trouble about thinking, as again Mr. Breck sadly discovered, was that it brought up both sides of a question: he couldn't more than get to feeling good about the execution of the Bearcat's commission, before the realization got to romping on him that on Asbestos' books *he* was still unfinished business. For everybody knew what Asbestos did to those who introduced his wife to boys Asbestos didn't like!

FURTHER to cloud his existence, Columbus was waiting grimly for him at the agency where the rent was still unpaid. And a boy's business always showed up in a bad light when Columbus looked at it.

Mr. Collins glanced at the clock and glared at his arriving aide. He seemed to have important things both on his mind and in his pocket. "I comes down de alley right after you is, jest now," he broached them. "And picks up a couple of clues you misses. But craves to hear first what sort of lie you done cooked up about dat fracas. What all

dat runnin' and bangin' and hollerin' up dar about?"

Mr. Breck stirred uneasily in his overalls, and decided to tell the truth. "Dat was me, gittin' de fight stopped," he presented the matter in its brighter—and larger—aspect.

"*Stopped?* Sounded like you was jest gittin' started."

"I gits de Masked Mauler beat up—by introducin' him to Annabelle. Asbestos git jealous den, and bust him down to half-size. Aint nothin' left of old Kokomo but he chassis—and Asbestos still ridin' *dat*, last I sees. Mix de Bearcat's money wid my brains, and you *got* somep'n!"

BUT Columbus was feeling detachedly in his pocket now—and Bugwine didn't like his expression. Then:

"Lie dat over again, runt; and lie it slow!" snapped his chief. "You tryin' to tell *me* a little squirt like Asbestos can beat up a heavyweight champ like Kokomo de Masked Mauler?"

"Seen him do it. And aint hospitals enough in Alabama to git dat Kokomo able to crawl into a ring wid de Bearcat tonight, *now*. Plumb ruint!"

"And is dey was," Columbus retorted instantly, "dey wouldn't be enough to git *you* put back together again when Asbestos gits through wid you, directly now, for introducin' his wife to Kokomo, neither! Dat whar you split your pants while you was patchin' your vest. Boy, put you in de fryin'-pan, and looks like only place you knows to go to is into de fire!"

Mr. Breck's overalls came up over his neck as he shrunk before the fatal accuracy of this. Asbestos wasn't through with him yet. . . .

"Steps out and collects de other five from de Bearcat—for de rent," he puttered feebly about the ruined foundations of his professional standing. "He seen Kokomo git licked, from fur up de alley."

"In a pig's pocketbook! No matter *what* you does, you does it ignorant!" "How-come ignorant?"

"Of de fight rules. Aint matter is de Bearcat been pallbearer for de Mauler, he cain't claim de decision by default till de Mauler's *done defaulted*,—till he aint show up when de gong clang at eight tonight,—can he?"

"Wait *four* nights, and old Kokomo still aint gwine be dar—I seen him when he come out dat cactus-bed!" Bugwine's

cockiness was returning, even in the face of a Columbus who kept feeling in his pocket, with a far-off, enigmatic look in his eyes.

ABOUT the improvised fight-arena in the grove near the cement-works that night the lights came on and the battle neared.

With the divulged identity of the maimed Kokomo still locked in the bosom of Bugwine Breck, in turn, cowering far back beneath the freight depot,—lest Asbestos find him,—there had been none to doubt the report sedulously spread throughout the day that the night's battle would be a grudge affair worthy of any customer's last quarter.

For the unknown Masked Mauler's well-known habit of appearing only anonymously before a fight—and only at the last minute then—had kept down any questionings or connectings of the Mauler with the noontime's stirring scenes about the Waldorf.

All afternoon, Asbestos Dunn had been strutting through alley after alley, loudly seeking Bugwine Breck. Columbus Collins also was carefully avoiding him—as though he feared that the human game-rooster in question might consider him even partially responsible for his stunted aide's personal and professional *faux pas* in the matter of Annabelle and Kokomo at the chili parlor. . . .

At seven-thirty, Bugwine Breck was seen emerging cautiously from beneath the freight-house, and heading toward the ringside.

At seven-fifty, the Bessemer Bearcat, a mountainous figure, scowling with professional ferocity, arrived at the ringside in his bathrobe, and firmly ascended the steps toward his corner. Confidence radiated from him: confidence that a distant Bugwine recognized as bought, partly paid for, and fully justified by Mr. Breck's deliveries! Wait till Columbus got the real low-down now on how good Mr. Breck's brains were!

Attaining the corner reserved for him, the Bearcat changed his scowl to a grin as he noted the perfection of his arrangements, the absence of the Masked Mauler and his manager. He held ham-sized hands aloft while he shook hands with himself, and bowed long and low to his public. In the bright lexicon of Bearcat a default-victory was not only as good as a decision by battle, but far better!

Bugwine, edging himself into the crowd—on the discreetly opposite side

from Asbestos—shook hands with himself too, privately.

Seven fifty-five! The puzzled Mr. Pony-horse Wheeler looked toward the Bearcat's opponent's corner, was alarmed at its emptiness—and then remembered the studied theatricalness of that mysterious battler's usual entry.

"Old Mauler be here yit—you know how he does," he encouraged his own fighter.

"Yeah, he'll be here!" What a manager didn't know, reflected the crafty Bearcat, didn't stir him up.

Seven fifty-nine, and the customers were growing restless. Mutterings, whistles, cat-calls betokened it. They had come for a grudge-fight, and a grudge-fight they would have, or else—

In the interest of good theater, the Bearcat arose easily, threw off his bathrobe, flexed his biceps, and glared blood-thirstily about him. "Whar-at de Masked Mauler?" he threw out a belated challenge that set the spectators to shivering delightedly. "Craves myself a killin'! Whar-at de Masked Mar—"

But just at this juncture the Bearcat was interrupted, dramatically and from the rear by an answering bellow of, "*Here I is!*"

And, bounding down the aisle, shedding his bathrobe and uttering battle-cries calculated to freeze the blood of a shark—followed by his manager and five seconds—came the huge, masked figure of an unmistakable fighter!

The strangled squawk of Bugwine, the sick sound from the startled Bearcat, were drowned in the vast acclaim of the customers. "Here he come! Here come de Masked Mauler! Jest like he always do—at de last minute, and totin' his own dynamite!"

WILDLY Bugwine wavered on legs like wet macaroni in their limpness. Across his nightmare swam the grim face of Columbus, hand again in pocket. The question of how a runt like Asbestos could beat up a house-sized pugilist like the Masked Mauler was superseded for Mr. Breck by that of: How could a total wreck, such as he had seen Kokomo rendered, appear in the ring at all? For Bugwine knew what scars and batterings this mask must conceal.

Then the personal vista that opened before him sent him reeling again in brain and body: he had taken the Bearcat's unholy five dollars, but the accidental beating achieved hadn't "taken."

And now he owed the Bearcat a refund and the landlord the rent, neither of which was at his command, while both the Bearcat and Asbestos would now be seeking his blood, with Columbus and Kokomo not far behind them—and the agency homeless in the morning: *that* would be his fault too!

"Brains, stand still while I kicks a couple of slats out of you! Ruins me right when I's gittin' good!" railed Bugwine hoarsely at the organic cause of his many-featured catastrophe. "Business back in a jam!"

Then squeaking sounds, as of a trapped rat, betrayed his further realization that he had said too much to Columbus to leave—and too much to the Bearcat to stay!

Clang! the gong interrupted his agony.

UP in the brilliantly lighted ring a Bearcat—too flabbergasted now for either fight or flight—was weaving wide-eyed from his corner to a battle for which he had neither heart nor plans. Somebody had slipped up!

From the opposite corner there rushed upon him an adversary terrifying in his mystery—doubly so to a Bearcat who had not only arranged for his absence but stood afar off and seen such arrangements notably carried out. A double-crossed sensation stole sickeningly across the pit of his stomach. Just wait, he growled, until he caught that stunted little left-shoed detective, and—

But just here two typhoons, an earthquake, and a landslide seemed to fall upon the Bearcat. Blow on blow, jab on uppercut; a whirlwind mixture of science, ferocity, and pile-driving that shot him grunting, gasping to the ropes, to the floor, into two clinches and a near-knockout before the clangor of the gong for the end of Round One saved him.

"Buck up, big boy! Verify yo'self! Remember you is de Bessemer B'arc, and t'ar into him now!" pleaded a frantic Pony-horse as visions of the loser's end of the purse kept getting in the way of the sponge with which he was plying his goggle-eyed fighter. "Championship waitin' for you, and customers all pullin' for you!" encouraged Mr. Wheeler frenziedly. "Git yo'self organized now and measure dat Mauler for his tombstone! T'ar into him and win de war!"

Dazed, dim-eyed, and punch-drunk, the battered Bearcat staggered to his feet, came back across Elysian fields to the sound of the gong again—a signal for

fresh massacre. He was larger, longer than his masked opponent; but he was helpless before the racking realization that somebody had blundered.

Cameralike, his one eye that was still working took in the ringside scene—glimpsed vaguely below him an over-alled five-footer endeavoring to dart for the open . . . and being nabbed in the neck-band, viselike, by a larger superior. Saw Asbestos Dunn working grimly toward the two—and then again the onslaught!

Coming out of his corner like a charging elephant, loomed the masked one now. The spectators roared their delight; they were getting what Pony-horse Wheeler had promised with their tickets—mayhem made legal, murder on the half-shell!

Then, suddenly, for the Bearcat at least, the charging elephant became a freight-train. With himself the other half of a head-on collision with it. Chin first, and lifted from the floor, before he was hurled through astronomy, via aviation, to ultimate overthrow, as he catapulted ingloriously backward—not only to the ropes but over them, to the ground below, where he lay stunned and twitching for a count of four hundred before the arriving ambulance interrupted the assistant referee, and an accident-ward ignominiously engulfed him for a month.

BUT up in the ring came other and—for Bugwine in particular—still more startling developments, as the referee, first holding aloft the pillow-like gloved hand of the victor, next lifted his mask as well, that all might look upon the face and identity of the new champion of the cane-brake country.

At which, however, a crow as of a boy choking upon a cocklebur emerged hideously from the stricken Mr. Breck. And his crows continued feebly while his feet scrabbled futilely upon the grass, as Columbus pounced upon him, held him firm-clutched by his suspender-crossing while the surging throng thinned and melted away about them.

For the victor had no marks—of table-leg or otherwise—upon his face at all! In fact—and the low moans of the devastated Mr. Breck betokened this—he was not even Kokomo Anderson!

Somewhere, somehow, some one indeed had blundered!

"Uh-huh! *Brains!*" Columbus' scoffing voice was already harshly triumphant in an anguished ear. "All time

THE MASKED MAULER

braggin' about dem brains of yourn! Well, boy, you is done drug 'em out to die in de open *dis* time, right alongside of you! But look first at what I got here in my pocket all evenin'—before Asbestos Dunn comes to kill you!"

Whereupon the suffering eyes of an assistant were focused with difficulty upon something that failed to mean anything on sight: a torn cloth label.

"Finds it," rasped Columbus, "whar dat big 'Kokomo' of yourn tore it off his shirt on dat clothes-line, gittin' away from dat shrimp Asbestos. Now I fotches it to show you how dumb *you* is—and why even a runt can beat your bruiser up so bad."

"Git Asbestos' jealous up, and he can lick a lion," reiterated Bugwine in a cross between a croak and a whisper.

"Naw! It's becaze your boy never *was* no fighter! He jest a fat four-flusher what aimed to go over big wid de women by tellin' 'em *he* was Kokomo Anderson what's de Masked Mauler—when dis laundry-label prove he wa'n't nobody but Elwood Muncie, what I used to know in Selma!"

"Den he—den he wa'n't—" Mr. Breck's eyes were starting from his head now in response to things he dared not even think.

"So all you done wid dem brains of yourn, Einstein," Columbus rumbled on, "was hire de wrong boy—git de wrong Mauler beat up accidental by Asbestos. Dat was de *real* Masked Mauler what put de Bearcat to sleep. . . . And now here come Asbestos Dunn after you!"

But as the panicked Bugwine essayed to break into final flight—his record for bungling now one hundred per cent—his universe shot dizzily into reverse. And dazzlingly dawned the light! In irrefutable proof for Columbus—and payment for the landlord—that for Bugwine Breck accident ever outranked design; the blunder was mightier than the brain. For the advancing Asbestos halted Bugwine and floored Columbus with his clarioned: "Sho was a smart stunt you pulled at de chili-parlor, Bugwine! Nothin' *but* brains. Dat's *service*; and you gits dem ten bucks now, for gittin' Annabelle and dat big gigolo to go in dar together—timed jest right for *me* to catch 'em red-handed at dey chili! Was he de right one, I forgives her; but was he de wrong one, I still makes a example and a woman-hater out of him, wid dat table-leg—from now on, till de fourteenth Sunday in December!"

The Star

*A venturesome
young gentleman
again indulges his
hobby of robbing
the wicked rich to
reward the deserv-
ing poor.*

By
**FRANK
VERNEY**

Illustrated by
R. F. James

SIR EDWIN WENSON of the Criminal Investigation Department was indulging his week-end passion for breakfast in bed with the Sunday papers. As completely a policeman in black silk pajamas, eating toast and marmalade, as he is in one of his notoriously perfect suitings at the helm of his Department, he turned over in his mind one item from a notorious gossip column which ran:

"The younger court set will be deprived a little longer of its two most popular members, Major Jimmy Lace and his charming wife Lady Patricia. They have recently been on a joy-ride to Capetown, and are returning via Egypt to give a *cachet* to the Cairo season. Jimmy, who is half American—and original anyhow—is one of those few remaining guardsmen (Ah me!) who ride the wreckage of death-duties and hard times, with that *elan* which once caused the Iron Duke or some one to remark of the Guards in battle, 'It is magnificent, but it is not war.'

"In Jimmy's case this achievement is remarkable, for he is, I am told, the mysterious philanthropist who at this late date is extensively financing a 'place-in-the-sun' scheme for indigent ex-warriors of the Great War. Considering that the pay of a Guards officer would not keep a Socialist M.P. off the Westminster dole, I wish the gallant Jimmy would tell me what market he is playing."

At the Yard next day Sir Edwin called into his room Chief Detective Inspector

Ribbon Burglar.



Wahid's gang jumped for Curragh, and upended him, senseless, into the river.

Curragh, who as most crooks know, looks like a retired gigolo, but is interested in no jazz that does not end at the Central Criminal Courts.

"When and where was it the last of those bloody Star Ribbon burglaries occurred?" Sir Edwin asked—knowing the sequence backwards.

Curragh answered with a brevity that belied the softness of his brogue:

"Capetown. Six weeks ago today. Fifty thousand pounds in notes. Victim, Liebenbaum—shady Rand millionaire. Report's in that file under your elbow, sor."

Wenson thrust at his subordinate the clipping of the paragraph on Jimmy Lace.

"See if that gives you any ideas. It comes to something when we have to get our pointers from a blasted snob-gossip."

Curragh bent a black head over the splurge, while Wenson stabbed a case-file with a forefinger.

"Not only was this gilded guardee in the Cape at the time, but you've got it down in your contact analysis that each of these millionaires who were robbed in England was first approached by him for a contribution to the ex-warrior fund this gossip-lizzie gasses about."

Curragh dropped the clipping on the desk. "They were also approached by nearly every begging organization in the country. As for the Cape affair, Major Lace was at a state ball at Government House at the moment that millionaire's safe was cracked."

"How do you know he was?" flashed Wenson.

"I don't know," returned Curragh dryly. "That's the report of the Cape police. I cabled for information when I observed Major Lace's name on the list of passengers disembarking there the day before. Ye'll not be forgetting, sor, that each of these Star Ribbon jobs was the work of a two-fisted professor who's forgotten more than was ever taught at Borstal—leave alone a lily-handed Guards officer. Three of the safes he opened were the latest combinations, and in the case of the whisky millionaire, one of our assistant commissioners was in the house at the time."

"Never mind about all that," Wenson said acidly. "You've had every 'regular' on the mat, who was not in jail; besides all the squeakers in London. There's a damned sight more in these cases than meets the eye. I don't see any professional planting snippets of Mons ribbon in each crib he cracks, even as a blind.

If Lace was as broke as this gossip-lizzie says, where does he get his money?"

Curragh offered cynically:

"Out of the fund he's collecting, probably. 'Overhead expenses' is the usual way. Ye're not suggesting that a brass-bound officer of the Guards is risking a ten-year stretch to put a lot of old Tommies on velvet?"

"He risked more than that in France to put millionaires on velvet. Check him up again and if you can't find where his money's coming from, send your best man to Cairo to catch him on the hop if he's gone there to plant another ribbon. I've had five Parliamentary questions to answer about these affairs!"

Curragh had gained neither his implacable reputation nor his position by ignoring the highly improbable. He said simply:

"I'll go myself—and fly there, if you'll sign the expense-chit, sor."

FIVE miles along the Gizeh road from Cairo by trolley car, taxi, or *arabeah*, is a Franco-Oriental edifice fringed by a few palm trees and known as the Mena House. It is from here that intrepid travelers venture by camel across the waterless desert (ten minutes) to gaze on Egypt's trade mark ("*Baksheesh gentlemen*"), and to have their photographs taken on the plinth of the Sphinx, or on the summit of—the camel. Its popular tea terrace is admirably adapted to listening-in to the conversation of other people, and behind the tub of blue hydrangeas and cerise geraniums that separated their tables, Chief Detective Inspector Curragh was having an unobserved and leisurely close-up of Major Jimmy Lace, C.M.G., D.S.O.

Long-limbed and bronzed, clad in a gray flannel suit slashed at the neck with the blue and red tie of the Brigade of Guards, Jimmy was draping himself over a low basket-chair and idly tickling the back of his wife's neck, while she and the Duchess of Newforest smiled at the enthusiasm with which he had just bought from a Pharaonic salesman a miniature garment intended for some small person in England whom he affectionately designated "Her Nibs."

Curragh sipped his tea as if it were full of sand. Having proved that Lace had no means beyond his regimental pay, he was now intent on squaring everything else into key with the mysterious Star Ribbon artist. Consequently he had at least hoped to find his quarry

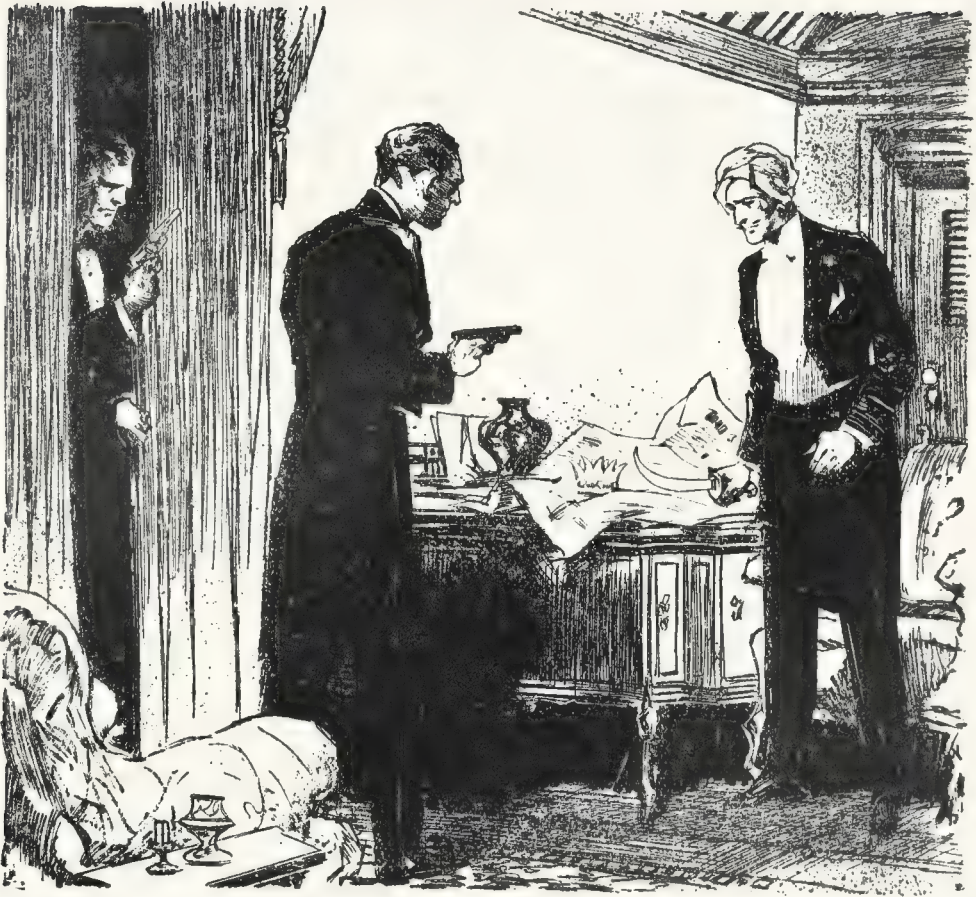
caressing the neck of another man's wife, or buying cocktails for something in the platinum-blond line. Nor in Curragh's experience did crooks—whether pro's or gifted amateurs—exhibit between jobs such authentic ease of manner, with a penitentiary trip still in debit.

But the real setback was that Jimmy and his party were merely doing the usual forty-eight-hour liner-jump to Cairo—according to the purser of their East Coaster, and the room clerk of their hotel. Precious little time to stage a burglary of the foolproof Star Ribbon type. And—by unguarded remarks that Curragh had picked up whilst sharing their rail compartment from the Alexandria docks—Jimmy's main problem was to show his wife all the sights in that time and yet help the Duchess find two Arab horses for her breeding farm at Newforest. So far he'd shown not the slightest interest in anything else. But once on a trail Curragh never let go until his man was where he intended putting him. He was however, seriously considering using his throat on a pint of iced beer at the inside bar, in preference to going on stretching his ears for the kind of thing that would not be said anyway, when for the first time that day he observed Jimmy's manner crisp up to something more kin to Ranelagh's star polo-thrill. He was staring past his wife and Curragh to the sandy road below the tea terrace, where the dreams of donkey-boys and squatting camel-men had been peculiarly disturbed by the arrival of a large white automobile. From this five Egyptian notables were being escorted by a tensely suave manager and groveling attendants to a reserved tea table.

THE focal point of this group and of a terrace full of tired tourists and idle rich, was a tall Cairene with the features and deportment of a well-fed Rameses, Saville Row clothes and a scarlet National *tarboosh*.

"What a grimly handsome sheik, Jimmy," remarked Lady Patricia Lace. "Why—it's Waddini Wahid! We met him at the Prime Minister's last season, Auntie."

"We met him everywhere, my dear," contributed the Duchess, along the handle of a lorgnette. "He was an epidemic, like Chaplin and Gandhi. Too odd that he should have red hair. What's his stable history, James? They say he's descended from Cleopatra."



"Have the goodness not to raise your voice, while your eyes dwell on this!"

Jimmy drew out a gold cigarette-case that bore the diamond feathers of the Prince of Wales, and drawled lazily:

"The Cleopatra that guy's descended from, Auntie, lived under a red lamp in the Suez *suk*—and I reckon there was a good slope in the descent at that." And he reflectively watched the notorious Nationalist leader fling commands to salaaming waiters.

"What do you mean by that tropical remark, Jimmy?" his wife wanted to know.

"Just what I say, honey," he told her amiably. "In ways of *siniquity*, your boy friend had Cleo beat before he'd finished plucking hairs from the bellies of the *bazaar* donkeys—excuse my Spanish. So if you are thinking of asking him over for a highball, don't."

The Duchess regarded Wahid with renewed interest, and said so, while Patricia smiled and said:

"Tell us more. He sounds far more amusing than the Sphinx. Isn't he cham-

pion of all the down-trodden Egyptians?"

"Outside his own country," agreed Jimmy. "In point of fact, he is the biggest racketeer since Nero. Give him his head and he'd make that ancient spot-merchant look as simple as yonder deb' with her guidebook Baedeker."

"Surely not," the Duchess demurred. "Our statesmen were all over him. He was at two of the royal garden-parties."

"That's politics," drawled Jimmy. "A slap on the back for all the Neros of the great peace, and a gutter-merchant's license for all the heroes of the great war. Six years ago when I was here on duty he was having leave-going British officers gunned in their bunks on the Desert Express, and dropping bombs on bunches of inoffensive Tommies in the bazaar cafés. And in the Great War, he divided his time between pinching trainloads of soldiers' comforts and filling the hospitals with— Well, that's enough to be going on with."

"You seem to have a down on him, darling," said Patricia. "Have you got him on that comic Black List of yours?"

Jimmy got up at that moment to speak to an Egyptian friend who had just arrived at an adjoining table.

"What Black List is that?" asked the Duchess, and Curragh listened intently for the answer.

Patricia laughed. "Jimmy's charity-list. He's collecting for some war-fund, and with his usual divine humor, he restricts the cadging to people he dislikes."

When Jimmy returned she asked:

"Will the ubiquitous Wahid be at King Fuad's party tomorrow night, I wonder, Jimmy?"

"We'll see when we get there," he said.

SHE stared at him in astonishment, and Curragh leaned forward again.

"Don't be septic, Jimmy! You know perfectly well we've got to get back to the ship. Besides, you refused to go to a Buckingham Palace party when you heard Wahid was going."

"One of the main functions of a near-American husband, young woman," he smiled, "is to provide his wife occasionally with her heart's desire. You said you'd like to give Fuad's Court the once-over, so consider it done. Now, Auntie, we'd better go and see my pal Abbas, the horsethief."

Curragh returned to Cairo by the next trolley car, and went direct to the British chief of police.

"I want," he said, "an invitation to King Fuad's reception tomorrow night, the loan of your two best sleuths, and some inside notes on Waddini Wahid." And as he backed this request with a personal letter from his own Chief to Captain Kilhame, he got what he wanted.

"Does Wahid hoard anything that would interest a European crook who specializes in big stuff, and knows how to nail it?"

"Tucked away in his harem or somewhere, we believe Wahid has the famous emerald crown of Tutankhamen," Kilhame told him. "He was foreman of the digging gang when Tut's tomb was dug up. The crown was missing at the official opening. It is worth a mint of money, but I don't suppose you—much less your crook—ever heard about it."

"That's fine," acknowledged Curragh grimly. "Now would Wahid be likely to take that emerald crown to the king's party for any reason?"

"As likely as you are to take one of the Pyramids," replied Captain Kilhame dryly. "The king and Wahid have as much use for each other as you and your crook. Furthermore, Wahid happens to be having an opposition show of his own the same night."

"I'll have an invite for that as well," said Curragh.

"There'll be no Europeans at Wahid's party, my friend—least of all my nominees. What's the great idea, anyway, in poaching on my preserves?"

"That I hope to tell you within the next forty-eight hours, sor—unless I'm trailing the wrong man. Meanwhile I'll still have that invite to the king's palace."

And it was the gold-embazoned command invitation of His Majesty King Fuad that passed Curragh into the royal palace next evening most discreetly at the rear of young Jimmy Lace and his womenfolk. This time the tall guard's appearance—to anybody but the relentless Curragh—made the suspicions of Scotland Yard look more fantastic than ever. Although he wore ordinary evening clothes, there was about him an authentic aristocracy which reduced the polyglot assembly to a small-town huddle. On his left lapel hung a wide string of miniature fighting decorations that made the three war medals on Curragh's democratic breast look like three quarters in the palm of a Ritz head-waiter. It was, however, the austere cross of St. Michael and St. George swinging beneath Jimmy's white butterfly tie in close proximity to the insignia of the *Légion d'Honneur* that symbolized Curragh's peculiar satisfaction at having taken the trail in person. Presumably that was why his subordinates had not seriously considered Lace in the first place. But that had no weight with Curragh. To pin on the wearer of such high-hat distinctions the most workmanlike series of crimes in this generation, would afford him grim content.

WATCHING Jimmy move about Fuad's throne-room with Lady Patricia, and the Duchess—coiffed with the Newforest coronet—on a background of eminent Egyptians liberally splashed with jeweled orders, avoirdupois, and similar authentications of social rectitude; observing him hobnob with the royal princes, viziers and judges; witnessing his intimacy with the British Commander in Chief, whose red tunic

gleamed as copiously with decorations as his forehead did with sweat, Curragh smiled sardonically.

At ten-thirty Lady Patricia remarked to her husband:

"Jimmy, who is that rather good-looking man over there—the one with the sad eyes and the three war medals? I've seen him before, somewhere. He seems very friendless."

"He would be, honey," Jimmy replied lazily. "He's a Scotland Yard man—so Billy Finche, that chatty A.D.C., tells me."

"Good Lord, and I thought he was trying to get off with me! What is he doing here, I wonder?"

"Looking after Fuad's spoons, I imagine, young woman. So don't collect any souvenirs while I am playing bridge. I'm going to put the Culbertson across the personal staff, presently. You and Auntie can find your own way home if I get hung up."

BUT it was to the palace exit that Jimmy went at eleven o'clock—duly stalked by the unrelenting Curragh. He stood for a few moments in the grand porch inspecting the stars, and a forecourt well stocked by guards and plainclothes police, and then lounged out to the public sidewalk. A solitary taxi came cruising past. Jimmy got into it and told the driver to go to the Semiramis hotel. If he heard the driver answer in Arabic the question of a near-by loafer, he took no apparent notice. Nor did he look twice at Curragh's dragoon, who lounged at the hotel entrance when he paid off the taxi, and entered the hotel.

At eleven-thirty, a corpulent Frenchman joined the cosmopolitan crowd in the hotel café, and drifted out past Curragh's watching sleuth.

With the bonhomie of the genuine Franco-Egyptian *boulevardier* registering on his whiskered face, and *La Vie Parisienne* under his arm, he peacocked away to Shepherd's Hotel and had an absinthe at the Long Bar. Then he came out to the car-park, where he entered a yellow car with a long bonnet and Alexandria number-plates.

Six minutes later Jimmy stopped the car a hundred yards short of Waddini Wahid's residence, got out and said:

"Turn your car round, keep her engine warmed up, and wait here. If I am longer than an hour, return to the garage."

While Fuad's palace of prestige and authority was knee-deep in guards and police, Wahid's house was invested by nothing but bunches of bazaar loafers and idle *fellaheen*. They squatted in the dust outside the compound gates smoking cigarettes and hookahs, and spitting *betel* with the freedom of the enfranchised, placidly explored their eternal obsessions of women and piasters. Just beyond, where the road hits the riverbank, Wahid's *dahabeah* gleamed against the misty blackness of the Nile with the provocative serenity of a travel-agency sign on Broadway or Trafalgar Square. Inviting meat for a couple of gunmen, Curragh had concluded earlier in the day—isolated as it was by gardens and quiet streets from the night life of Cairo. Just inside the gates stood six big Nubians, wearing on their black foreheads the golden asp of Cleopatra and cuddling to their massive shoulders long hafted spears of the same era. Two bronzed gentlemen in morning-coats and scarlet fezzes scrutinized Jimmy and his card of admission and passed him in, to the music of three phonographs which were blaring to the stars and a couple of hundred fezzed prophets, three different examples of the latest jazz records. As a set-off to this composite gesture of Egypt for the Egyptians, Jimmy noted several empty pistol cartridge-boxes under a mimosa bush.

By this he paused and inspected the layout. He was in the typical walled garden of an Eastern nabob with the privacy of a harem to secure, and a good deal of exhibited wealth to guard. The only exit was the gate he had entered, or through the house which formed the fourth side of this Islamic stronghold. Passing the fountain that played between four palms, Jimmy sauntered onto the terrace and drifted with other guests into the big central hall.

HIGH overhead and level with the lattice of the harem balcony, a great crystal chandelier collected the colors of the stained glass roof and focused their spectroscopic tints on Waddini Wahid. On a gilt stool and a raised section of floor, he sat like an Emperor, talking to a number of tarbooshed Nationalists and drinking sherbets—or rather whisky, thought Jimmy—from a goblet.

A stocky Egyptian in a fez and dinner-suit like Wahid's appeared at Jimmy's elbow and inquired his business.

"I should like a few private words with

Wahid Bey, if that can be arranged," Jimmy told him in French.

"On what subject? I am a secretary. Are you of the Soviet mission?"

"I am the personal representative of an Indian Maharajah friend of the Bey," stated Jimmy. "My business is with your chief alone—and the keyword is 'emerald'."

The secretary considered this, his eyes ranging the prosperous contours of his visitor, and said:

"I will ask if he can receive you."

Jimmy loafed to the shrinelike Arab fireplace in which date logs smoldered with aromatic charcoal in a cheap and showy tiled grate. Above it on an incongruous bracket of chromium plate, was a life-size head of Cleopatra made of the same material and crowned with the golden asp. Jimmy noted this, for he thought it masked the door of a wall safe. But as a pair of gilt Swiss cuckoo clocks obstructed the operation of such a device, he lounged on in apparently casual inspection of the jumble of flamboyant furniture and *objets d'art* that personified nothing but a bank-roll run amok in a cheap and showy market.

There was nothing of this note in the small audience chamber to which the secretary presently conducted his visitor. And while Jimmy waited there for Wahid, he swiftly examined the combination-lock of the big steel safe. But he was seated in one of the leather chairs, reading his *La Vie* when Wahid entered.

Jimmy rose with a bow that was as much a masterpiece as his make-up, produced the business card of a famous firm of Bombay jewelers, and explained that he was a jewel expert specially commissioned by the Nizam of Scinde.

"I have come," he concluded, "to buy from you two or perhaps three emeralds like the one you sold to His Royal Highness in London a year ago, during the imperial conference."

Wahid asked, in that husky tenor voice with the brutal snap which had helped to daze the women of Mayfair and would have doubled the pull of any ruthless he-man of the talkies:

"Why do you come to talk business tonight?"

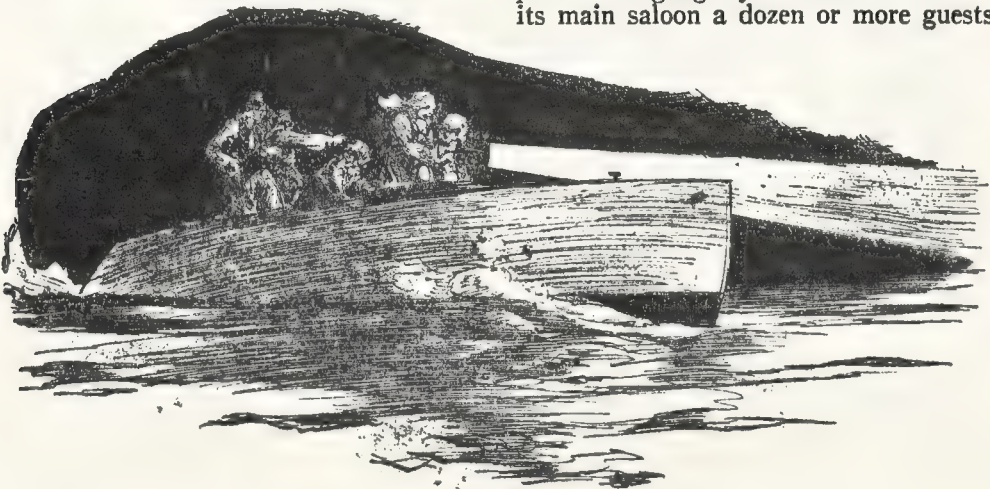
"Tomorrow, monsieur," declared Jimmy, "I go on to Constantinople to see some emeralds belonging to the late Caliph—if I do not buy yours."

Wahid thought this over, inspecting his visitor with interest.

"Very well—I am ready to talk business of that kind," he decided. "You shall wait—for perhaps half an hour. I will send some one to amuse you."

As part of that amusement Jimmy contrived an effective survey of the river-side of the house. Six more Nubians decorated the only entrance on this front, and the windows were Moorish slits high up in the walls. One of the black guards happened to yawn up at the brass alarm gong over his head, displacing the white fleece hanging between his shoulders. Low on his buttocks hung the leather case of a large revolver. Obviously anyone who wished to depart against the will of Wahid would need luck as well as ingenuity!

Approximately half of the fifty odd clocks that decorated Wahid's audience-hall were chiming midnight when the secretary conducted Jimmy back to the office. Wahid dismissed his squint-eyed vassal, ignored the safe, and led the way to the river exit, crossing the river path to the gangway of the *dahabeah*. In its main saloon a dozen or more guests



watched a game of chess, and forward, a number of servants and hands sat about doing nothing with the time-honored efficiency of the East. Wahid went direct to a stateroom aft of the main saloon, where an attendant brought coffee and cigarettes.

"Now, monsieur," he said in that husky voice, "we can get to business. You know the sum the Nizam paid me for the emerald I sold to him in Paris? Forty-five thousand pounds." And his topaz eyes glimmered at Jimmy like those of the sacred cats on the curtained partitions.

"Forty thousand was the amount, monsieur," corrected Jimmy. "And the place was London—unless His Highness misinformed me."

Wahid raised his heavy eyelids at this precision, as if he had not expected it.

"Have you the money with you now?"

Jimmy gestured away the suggestion as an affront to the intelligence of a sophisticated French business-man.

"But certainly not, monsieur. It would be of a foolishness to carry about at night such large sums of money. If I select any of your emeralds, we can rendezvous at my bank in Cairo tomorrow morning, and complete the transaction in gold standard dollars."

"Very good," agreed Wahid. "I shall bring the emeralds. Please remain here." He passed to the stateroom beyond, closing the communicating door behind him.

Jimmy rapidly reviewed the spacious, tapestry-hung cabin. Through one large square open window he could see the dark mud of the steep bank to which the *dahabeah* was moored, and through the other, the mist lying close on the dark face of the Nile. Then he softly bolted the outer door, and put an ear to the one through which Wahid had disappeared, reflecting with grim satisfaction that it was typical of the Eastern mind to secrete valuables in an obscure

hide-up, instead of in that modern safe within the guarded house.

Wahid returned a few minutes later, carrying a small and battered tin hat-box. He looked at Jimmy curiously, a peculiar smile playing at the corners of his Ramesian mouth. With a curved Bedouin knife, handled like an expert, he slit the string binding from the box hasp, removed an old newspaper and laid on the table a small crown of yellow gold. Around its plain rim a frieze of large square emeralds gleamed greenly in the subdued rose of the cabin light, acquiring an almost sinister verity by contrast with the vacant sockets from which a few stones had been removed.

It was perhaps the vanity inherited from his mother of the Suez *suk* that impelled him to remark dramatically:

"Monsieur, no eyes but yours and mine have dwelt on that crown for five thousand years," for his topaz slits were focused on his auditor in observance of its effect.

Jimmy drawled quietly but clearly:

"So I understand, my friend. Have the goodness not to raise your voice—while your eyes dwell on *this*."

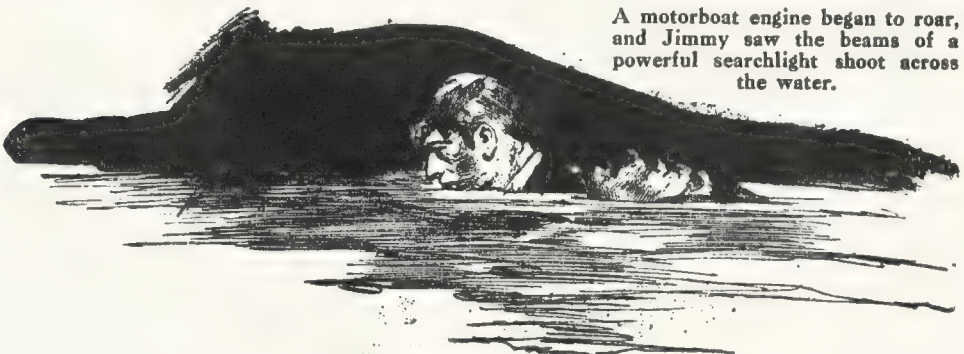
And Waddini Wahid gazed suddenly into the muzzle of Jimmy's automatic.

Wahid did not flinch, nor did he betray the slightest sign of surprise. He showed his marvelous teeth in a smile:

"You were obviously right, Inspector Curragh."

Jimmy did not look round to see whom Wahid was addressing, for he felt a circle of cold steel at the back of his bare neck, and heard the crisp command: "Stick 'em up."

To the triumphant Curragh, ingrained by the traditional effect of a pistol muzzle in a vital spot, all was now over but the handcuffs. But the guardsman had not spent four years in front-line trenches for nothing. On one occasion—a German raid for prisoners—he had been in



A motorboat engine began to roar, and Jimmy saw the beams of a powerful searchlight shoot across the water.

a similar predicament. He followed that precedent—with a reflection in a cabin mirror to help him. Slowly he raised both arms, letting his own pistol fall with a capitulatory thump on the table. Then in one quick movement he dropped his left hand to the menacing barrel, arched his neck and jerked Curragh's weapon sideways. The cartridge exploded as it was bound to do. The bullet struck Wahid in the shoulder just as he hooked the Arab disemboweling knife into Jimmy's padded stomach. Instantly Wahid's strong-arm squad erupted into the stateroom from the adjoining cabin. Jimmy grinned, grabbed the emerald crown, and dived through the open window into the Nile. Curragh, intent only on making a capture, disentangled himself from the curtains behind which he had been hiding, and leaped for the window also, smoking pistol in hand. Seeing their leader slumped on the divan clutching a bloodstained shirt-front, Wahid's gang misinterpreted the situation, and jumped for Curragh. One knocked him senseless across the window-ledge with a brass bludgeon, and another completed the transaction by instantly up-ending him into the river.

Jimmy saw the body fall as he struck out for mid-current. Assuming it was one of Wahid's Arab retainers in close pursuit, he waited for this menace to break water. Curragh's body bobbed up a few yards downstream. Jimmy dived for a surprise attack. A clean get-away was impossible with a strong swimmer close in his wake. But the moment he gripped the other's throat he realized he was handling an unconscious man; then he saw it was the detective bleeding profusely from a bad wound in the head. Looping the emerald crown on one arm, he turned on his back and towed Curragh into midstream. He could not leave a white man to be drowned by a bunch of Egyptian thugs, policeman or no policeman.

HE had covered a hundred and fifty yards, when a motorboat engine began to roar, and he saw the wide beams of a powerful searchlight shoot across the water near the *dahabeah*. If that craft came downstream, as it would do if the steersman had sense, the odds were against making his objective or escaping observation. Jimmy knew that stretch of the Nile intimately, for he had lived two years at Kasr El Nil Barracks, just below the bridge.

The steersman had sense. He cast twice across river opposite Wahid's *dahabeah*, then came threshing down mid-current on a course in direct line with the guardsman and his salvage. Jimmy struck obliquely across-current toward another *dahabeah* and some launches moored at the Sporting Club raft. As if in anticipation of this maneuver, the pursuing boat changed course when Jimmy was within thirty yards of the hide-up.

To make matters worse, Curragh now began to struggle. To check this fatal complication, Jimmy held Curragh's head under water until he was quiet again. It was now useless to try and make that cover, for Wahid's speedboat was within forty yards, its bow light blazing a white wedge in between. Jimmy waited his moment, and dived just in time, taking Curragh with him just like a sack of coal. When he came up, gasping for air, the speedboat was thirty yards downstream and curving to the other bank. Jimmy now struck inshore again, keeping on the edge of the swift current, and paddled his man to the boat stage of his hotel as the motorboat roared upstream on the far side.

TWENTY minutes later, in evening clothes, complete with decorations, Jimmy stood on the deck of his hired cabin-cruiser, and watched Wahid's boat pass once more upstream. Returning to the shuttered saloon, he found Curragh sitting up fingering the rough bandage on his head and staring at his surroundings. He watched the guardsman fill a *liqueur* glass with cognac until the liquid overhung the brim and hold it up to the silver-plated cabin light with a lean hand as steady as the stone-blue eyes which slowly encompassed the detective.

Curragh's expression suggested a torpid but vicious cobra undergoing the unnatural experience of being hypnotized by a jungle partridge. Jimmy met this menacing stare, handed him the drink, then cocked a long leg across the end of the settee and asked whimsically:

"Well, Mr. Inspector Curragh, if the question is not too personal, what were you doing bathing in the Nile in your glad suiting?"

Curragh slowly drank the brandy, then threw off the blanket in which his rescuer had swathed him. Standing as naked as when he was born, he said sternly:

"If ye think ye are getting off because ye pulled me out of the river, ye are mistaken. It is my duty to arrest ye,

Major Lace, for robbery with violence, and on suspicion of being the perpetrator of the Star Ribbon burglaries. Where are my clothes?"

Jimmy considered him through his eyeglass and answered ruthlessly:

"In that case, Inspector, it is my duty to dump you back in the Nile on suspicion of being a darned mischievous corpse! So you won't need clothes. Now sit down again, before you fall down."

CURRAGH neither fell nor sat. Revitalized by his second cognac, he picked up the blanket, and hitched it firmly around his waist.

Focusing his hard eyes on the stone-blue pair regarding him with the flickerless immobility of bayonet points, he completed his arraignment:

"Besides being a Detective Inspector of the metropolitan police, I happen to be on the Committee of the British Legion of ex-Service men. In that capacity, I have recently uncovered the information that although ye were penniless six months ago, ye have expended eighty thousand pounds on ex-soldiers, scalawags and their families. That, roughly, is the amount of those Star Ribbon jobs. A few weeks ago ye capped that by initiating a settlement scheme for war-crocks with a donation of fifty thousand pounds. Did ye or did ye not?"

"Five per cent less than fifty thousand, to be exact, Inspector," drawled Jimmy amiably. "But go right ahead and let's hear what evidence you've got to make whoopee with these ingenious deductions."

"By another peculiar coincidence," concluded Curragh grimly, "fifty thousand was the sum taken from a Cape millionaire, whilst ye were at a state ball in Capetown—just as ye were at the King's palace this night."

"I remember something of that affair, now you mention it, Inspector," Jimmy remarked. "But we are not getting anywhere, are we? You said something about arresting me for something or other."

Curragh ran a talonlike hand over his bandaged head and glanced around the little cabin as if in search of a weapon, Jimmy watching him with eyes from which all semblance of humor had fled. Then Curragh advanced a pace, thrust his chin forward and snapped:

"Did ye l'ave a snippet of Mons ribbon on Wahid's ship this evening?"

"So far as I know, I left nothing anywhere this evening, my friend," said Jimmy. "But suppose you spit out just what's hurting you, and we'll see what we can do about it."

Curragh did not answer immediately. His glance had dropped suddenly to the fighting decorations on his quarry's breast. It was fixed on the miniature Mons Star, in the place of honor next the D.S.O. From there it veered slowly to his own three war medals which lay on the table where Jimmy had placed them, their ribbons black with immersion in the Nile. Slowly he turned and lifted these up, holding them in the scarred palm of one hand and staring at them. Thoughtfully he picked with a fingernail at a smear of mud and blood on another Mons Star. Gently laying down the medals on the white table-top, he poured out two tots of brandy. Turning again to Jimmy who was calmly watching these proceedings, he stood with a glass in each hand and met the guardsman's level blue gaze.

"I'M sorry, sor," he said slowly, deliberately. "The crack that haythen swine laid on me skull in Wahid's houseboat, has gone to me head entirety. I cannot remember wan single thing since I saw ye and your lady wife at the King's party this avening."

And handing Jimmy the other glass, he toasted gravely: "My very best respects, sor."

"Chin-chin, Curragh," Jimmy returned after a short pause. And eye to eye, comrades of a 1914 battlefield, they drank.

Curragh reversed his empty glass on the table, smacked his lips and said reflectively:

"There is just one thing I am very sorry indade about, Major—an' that is Mr. Wahid's crown."

"Oh?" said Jimmy, pausing in the act of putting his glass beside Curragh's. "And what is that?"

Curragh scratched his lean jaw, looked at Jimmy out of the corners of his eyes and murmured:

"Ah—of course. I was forgettin' ye know nothing about that, sor. It was a little ornament me Egyptian acquaintance used to bait a trap this evening. A bazaar copy of the famous emerald crown of King Tut. I regret to say, sor, it is worth no more than a hundred piasters. A very cautious rascal is Mr. Wahid."

Lost Hurricane

A stirring story of wild air adventure by the pilot writer who gave us "Treasure via Airplane."

By LELAND JAMIESON

COLLIE McGINUS, resplendent in a new passenger uniform of Seaboard Airlines, bent over the weather-map in the meteorological office at the Jacksonville Airport, tracing with his finger the probable movement of the storm. Behind him stood a group of four men: Channing, heir to the Channing oil millions; Lentman, division superintendent for Seaboard; Fitzgerald and Whitman, of Channing's party. By Collie's side was Pascal, of the Weather Bureau.

Channing was a young, expensively turned-out man, perhaps twenty-six or twenty-seven, who was inclined toward heaviness. His face was full, well-fed; one could see that stubbornness, selfishness and anger all had left their marks upon it. Dissipation was there too, more than usually visible this afternoon; Channing was in an ugly mood from too much Scotch the night before.

"I'd like to know why I can't get through!" he snapped at Superintendent Lentman. "I bought every seat in your airplane, and hell is going to pop around here if your pilot doesn't take my party into Miami before dark! Nancy Conrad is getting married, and all these people have to be there."

He paused for a moment, and then went on, seeming to gather momentum and anger as he did so,

"All this talk of a hurricane is nonsense! You've just showed me the report for the entire Florida coast—there isn't a station reporting a solid overcast. All of them have perfect weather! Yet you stand there and waste my time being vague about storm warnings! Sure I know there've been warnings; I've lived in Florida ten years, off and on, and I've seen a hundred of 'em. And only one ever amounted to anything. Hell, man, don't be childish! If there was a hurricane down there, I wouldn't *want* to go. But you can't show me one. I've studied meteorology a bit. I know it isn't going to strike the coast, at least before we can get through."

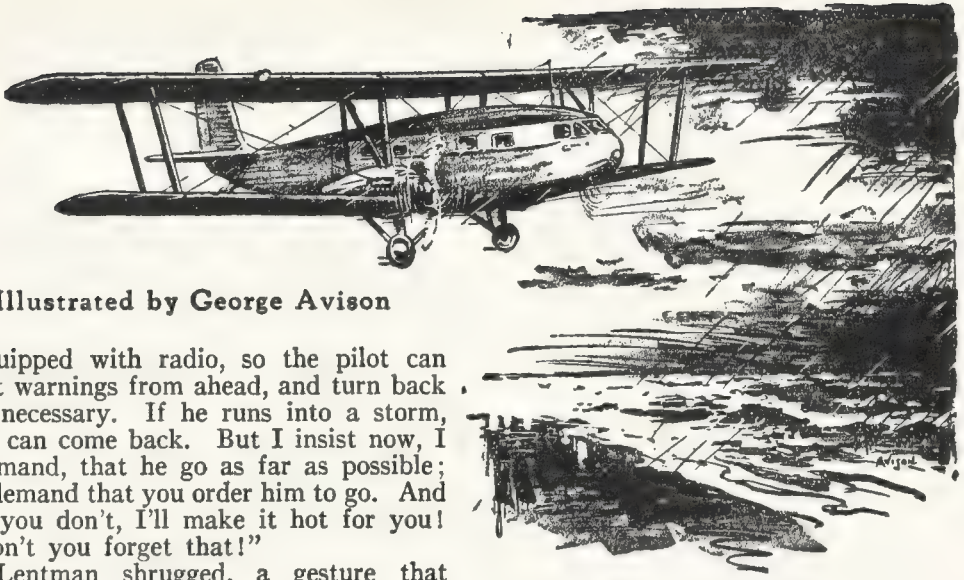
Lentman replied in a harassed tone: "Mr. Channing, I'm sure you don't quite understand my position. There may be no danger from this storm. But on the other hand, we've been getting warnings for four days, and—"

Channing, eyes dangerous with anger, shook his finger under Lentman's nose. "Have I asked you to send your airplane through a storm?" he challenged, and himself supplied the answer explosively: "No! But right now there's no storm down there, and if you don't waste all afternoon with asinine delay, there won't be one before we reach Miami. If this thing *should* develop and cut across our path, why can't your pilot turn around and go back to the nearest field and land? Of course he can. I'm not trying to make him fly bad weather—and I don't want to fly it. But I am demanding that he take my party as far as it is safe to go. And there's no reason in this world why he shouldn't do it!"

"Of course, Mr. Channing," Lentman attempted to explain; "but—"

"Don't argue with me!" the other snapped. "I know when I'm right and when I'm not. I'm a sportsman pilot myself. I own a plane. I've flown on every major airline in this country as a passenger. You're trying to manufacture excuses, man! Your plane is





Illustrated by George Avison

equipped with radio, so the pilot can get warnings from ahead, and turn back if necessary. If he runs into a storm, he can come back. But I insist now, I demand, that he go as far as possible; I demand that you order him to go. And if you don't, I'll make it hot for you! Don't you forget that!"

Lentman shrugged, a gesture that came involuntarily, and one which increased Channing's wrath. "I have no doubt that you can, Mr. Channing, and will. But I am powerless; I can't order McGinus to go out against his better judgment. If he wants to take you, he has the authority to do so. His decision will be entirely final."

"What kind of executive are you?" Channing sneered, glancing at Collie's broad back. "Aren't you in charge? You'd *better* order him to go as far as it is safe to go."

Lentman returned wearily: "You don't understand. Nobody can order a pilot out against his will. If you were the President of the United States, you couldn't make him go. Your ideas of safety might not coincide."

BAFFLED, Channing stood in angry indecision for a moment. He looked at Lentman, then at Fitzgerald and Whitman. For an instant he stretched his arm to touch McGinus on the shoulder; then his eyes fell on Pascal of the Weather Bureau.

"You're the weather man," he reminded him caustically. "Can you see any danger to the plane in going through? Speak up, man!"

"Well, sir," Pascal, somewhat confused by this direct demand, replied, "I don't just know, sir. We thought—"

"You don't know?" Channing challenged. "The Government's paying you with my taxes, and you don't know! You're paid to know. You get busy and find out, if you don't know!"

"Yes sir. We thought we had this disturbance located—we were following

it. But it got away from us yesterday and—"

"Lost—one hurricane!" Fitzgerald, from the doorway, chuckled.

"You're going to find it, and find it quick! I'm sick and tired of this delay. We could have gone a hundred miles while—"

Collie McGinus, broad and tall, huge in aspect, turned slowly and deliberately from the weather map.

"Cut it out!" he said; and although his tone was soft, it was so cold and menacing that silence fell. "I came in here to talk to Pascal, and to read the weather map. You and your party will have to get out—I can't study weather while you stand back there bellyaching." And then, with a gesture as of brushing off an insect that annoyed him, he swung back to the map board.

Channing recovered from his surprise. "You can't talk to me like that!" he snarled. "I'll—"

"Oh, yes, I can," Collie said evenly over his shoulder. "And if you don't get out of here, I'll throw you out!"

The party left; Lentman closed the door behind them, and then turned back to Collie apprehensively. "Listen," he declared, "you want to keep that tongue of yours inside your face. Channing swings a stick with Seaboard—he owns a block of stock that makes him powerful."

Collie looked up and grinned; and his leathery face broke into a hundred minute wrinkles near his eyes. "He may be, but he's a cheap skate just the same. . . . Now, about this storm."

"Well," said Pascal, "I don't really see much danger for the next few hours. If we knew just where it's centered, and which way it's moving, you'd be safe enough. The last report we got, it was southeast of Miami, and moving west. It ought to pass south of the Straits of Florida and not cause any trouble. But on the other hand, we've had no report on it in twenty hours."

"How fast do they travel?" Collie asked. He was new in this country, new on the run. For years he had flown night mail with B-T Airlines, Cleveland to New York; but weather there and weather here were vastly different things.

"Sometimes slow, sometimes mighty fast," Lentman said. "This one seems to have been almost stationary for a day or two. But when it does start, it may sweep in at forty miles an hour. And it may change its course. You can't tell where it's going to hit."

"Hm-m-m. I wonder how a Condor will behave itself in one?" Collie asked, half musing to himself. "They say there's lots of wind."

"Wind!" Pascal ejaculated. "Listen, in '26 they recorded a hundred and twenty miles an hour on the ground!"

COLLIE made no answer for a time, but looked long and thoughtfully at the weather map before him. Finally he glanced up at Lentman.

"If I don't go, and there's no storm later, Channing will probably get you fired. So I'll go. If I run into dirty weather, I'll come back. That's all he's asked for anyhow; he won't have any squawk."

Lentman shrugged again, that characteristic gesture. "I'm afraid of it, but I won't stop you if you think you can take care of yourself. Don't start just to protect me. I can get another job. Those things are treacherous."

"If I'd ever seen one, I'd feel better myself!" Collie grinned. "But I'll have the beach to follow, and I can't get lost. Still, I wish there were a radio-beam to guide me."

"I'll have the ground stations stand by constantly. We'll give you any movement of the storm that we discover. Again, don't start out just to save my skin, old man. You do what you think is best for you in the cockpit, and the passengers behind you."

The big man nodded soberly. "Right," he said. "I'll go—and I'll turn tail and run if I hit something mean. After all,

I guess Channing has a right to expect me to attempt it, with the reports along the coast. The trouble is, I don't know one of the damn' things when I see it!"

He walked out, a splendid figure in trim-fitting blue. His white-topped cap was tilted at a jaunty angle.

LENTMAN went to the passenger waiting-room to announce the continuation of the trip which had, that morning, left New York; and Hollis Perkins, the diminutive hostess on the plane, picked up her hamper of fresh sandwiches and vacuum jug of coffee, and went out through the marquee to the waiting Condor. Guy Martin, co-pilot, was already checking the gas-tanks in preparation for departure when Collie should come to a decision. From his position on the wing he called: "What's the word? We going for a ride?"

Collie grinned and nodded. "We're going hunting for a hurricane!"

He walked through the long cabin to the cockpit, took his seat and adjusted himself for the departure. Channing, a moment later, emerged from the marquee and climbed aboard, followed by his entire party, men with pallid skins and tired eyes; women, smart and fashionably attired, and conscious of their charm. They took their seats, calling to each other from one end of the cabin to the other; and Channing, as the host, walked the length of the aisle, seeing that the women were comfortable, occasionally stopping to droop an arm about one or another's shoulders. And Collie heard him say to one of them: "Sugar, haven't you known me long enough to know I'd do it—that I'd make them take us through?"

Collie grunted in disgust, and through the open cockpit window, hurried Martin with the final preparations. Then, when the co-pilot was clear of the propellers, he cranked the engines, waited while they warmed. Lentman came out a minute later, a fresh report of weather in his hands, and passed it to the cockpit. "Miami has a northwest wind!" he called. "Pascal says the storm is moving north—you'll have no trouble now, he thinks, because it may continue out into the Atlantic and exhaust itself. But just the same, you watch your step!"

Collie nodded, taxied out and took off. He turned southeast toward the Atlantic; and once above the yellow ribbon of beach, turned almost south and settled to the grind of flying. The engines,

LE AIRPORT

Lentman came out with a fresh report of weather. "You watch your step!" he called.

"Conquerors" of *DO-X* and trans-oceanic fame, growled smoothly, whipping their propellers through the air, sweeping the massive plane above the ground at a hundred and twenty miles an hour.

The weather here was perfect, with billowy fluffs of cumulus above, and a smooth sea-breeze quartering behind them, helping them make speed. The visibility was as unlimited as the power of the human eye. The curving beach, with a dark strip from the ebbing tide, reached on and on, climbing until it lifted itself to the horizon, and descended on the other side. There was no cause for worry here, and it was easy to understand why Channing had refused to accept blindly the forecast of possible danger farther on.

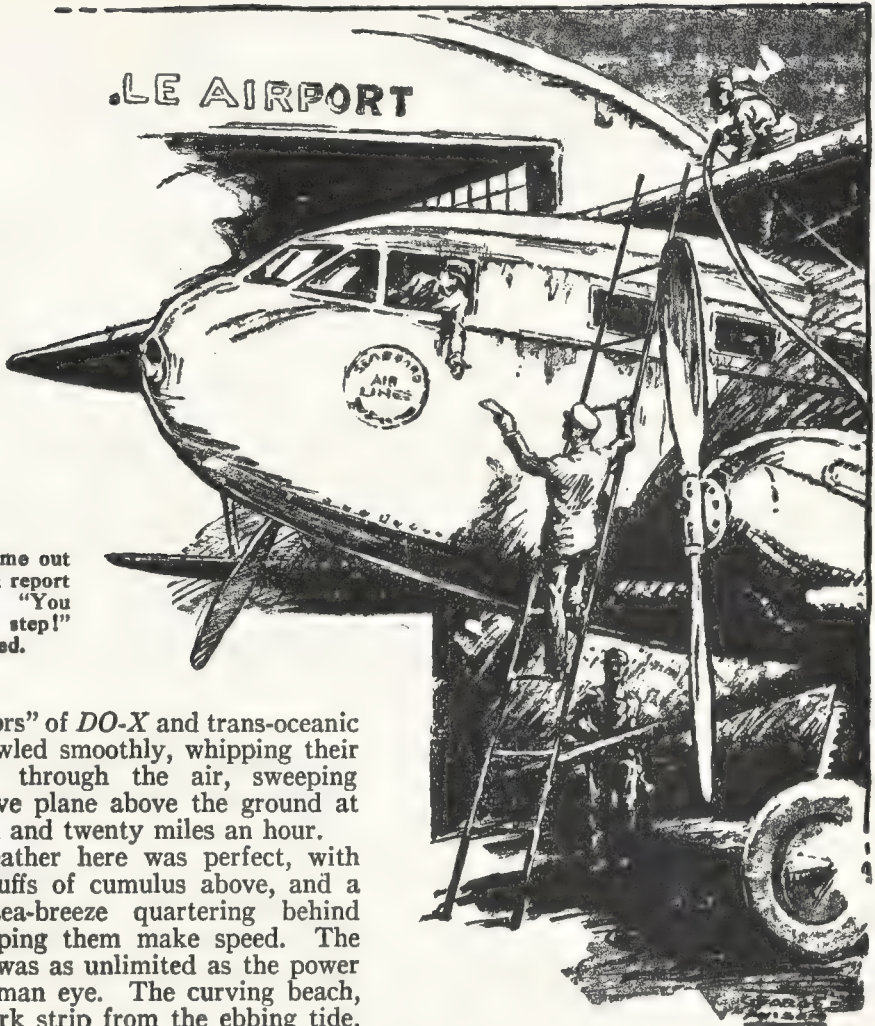
Yet Collie McGinus was uneasy. Although flying was as natural to him as swimming is to an aquatic champion, his nerves were taut. Two factors aggravated this. He was flying into weather which could not, with any accuracy, be predicted. And he was new upon the run. Three weeks ago, following a final heated disagreement with the powers in control of B-T Airlines, he had resigned to take this place with Seaboard. Lentman had obtained it for him, and he had gone to Atlanta for the passenger operation from that point to Miami. Thus he had flown the line for two weeks only, and while he knew the general contours of the coast, and the names of the towns

he passed above, he did not know the vagaries of the subtropical weather he must go through.

But, he decided, studying the last report that Lentman had passed up to him, he would go on, and see for himself if there was any danger.

St. Augustine and the historic fort slipped underneath upon the right. Daytona Beach showed, some minutes later, beyond the nose. Collie eased his throttles back and came in on a long, slow glide; and meanwhile Martin, hammering at his radio-key, flashed out the message that they were landing now. The plane touched, rolled into the mild east wind, taxied to the fuel-pits.

Within ten minutes they were in the air again, climbing to three thousand feet above a wilderness of blazing white sand, and palm trees and intermittent marshes. The head of the Indian River became



a spot of silver in this field of green-black vegetation. The coast, under ideal weather, unfolded as the minutes passed.

Radio reports came in at intervals, bald, abbreviated words in code that Martin translated into the latest information on the weather. Miami had broken clouds with a ceiling of a thousand feet, a northwest wind of seven miles an hour, with the forecast of "no change within the next four hours." And after getting five of these reports, and finding no drastic change in the condition, Collie leaned across to Martin and yelled in his companion's ear:

"It looks as if this Channing made a fool of all of us! I'll bet a hundred dollars there isn't a hurricane within three hundred miles!"

Martin grinned and nodded, adding: "I hope you're right about it. These hurricanes are mighty playful things!" And he tapped out a message to the radio station at Orlando: "*Condor No. 7 position 11 north Eau Gallie period no signs bad weather ahead everything okay.*"

But ten minutes later they did see signs of weather. A blue-black cloud seemed to reach down from the sky and take root in the ground. They saw it from afar and watched it carefully.

"Nothing but a thunderstorm," Martin said at last. "It's local."

"Yes; I've no doubt it's local," Collie agreed. "But it's right on top of Vero Beach. I'd planned to land there and fill up with gas—just in case we had to take a long drag to get around something. But we'll never get this bus down in all that mess."

This proved to be the case. Vero was obliterated in a downpour of tropical rain, and although Collie made two efforts to land upon the field, the blinding smash of water on the glass before his eyes, and the vicious currents of wind in the center of the thunderstorm, made this too dangerous to persist. He passed on, and five minutes later was in sunshine, with the beach and ocean bright and fresh ahead. Yet going on without a complete gasoline supply caused him no little apprehension; gasoline is the best insurance against trouble that any pilot has.

THIRTY miles beyond Vero he saw another bank of clouds ahead. They were not extremely low, but there was about them a peculiar darkness, a grayness, that was unusual. Collie eased

off on his revs, dropped the nose a little and came slowly down. At five hundred feet he slipped carefully beneath the cloud-bank, and with anxious eyes tried to peer on into the distance for further evidence of danger.

The visibility, now, was low, as if a haze had swept in from the ocean to obliterate from view what lay beyond. The beach, through the front glass of the Condor, seemed to terminate uncertainly not two miles away. Then a light rain began to smear across the glass; and on the surface of the sea were racing whitecaps and the quivering windstreaks that mark the coming of a sudden and violent blow.

GUY MARTIN, his face a mask, stared through his side window at the ground. Collie watched the beach, observed the sudden drift caused by the increased velocity of the wind from the Atlantic. He was a stubborn man, an excellent pilot, a veteran of countless flights and numerous emergencies. So he did not, at this evidence of doubtful weather, turn back now. The hurricane was reported to the south and east of Miami, and he could not see how it would have changed its course and swung up a hundred miles along the peninsula of Florida before moving inland. He didn't think it would have had time to do that, even if it had turned northward. Miami, with broken clouds, was ninety miles away; he could, Collie believed, fly through almost anything for a space of minutes if better weather lay ahead.

Yet he did not trust his judgment altogether. He leaned to Martin, put a question in the other's ear.

"What is this stuff we're going into? A thunderstorm that's spread out on the map, or is this genuine?"

The co-pilot shook his head in doubt. "I don't like the look of it," he said. "But I don't know. I'm game to go in a little farther and have a look around."

"Right! I don't want to go too far. But it seems a crime to turn back now, when Miami is just around the corner."

If he had been alone, Collie no doubt would have gone on, just for the zest of fighting this obstacle which Nature had concocted in his path. But he had twenty people whose safety was his complete responsibility. He could not risk their lives.

Yet he was a sanguine man, confident, capable, ready to do battle with the

elements. He would go on until he himself was satisfied that there was danger in continuing, and then he would turn back.

So he went on. The wind increased, not suddenly, as he would have expected it to do in a storm as violent as a hurricane, but slowly. It grew from twenty miles an hour to thirty-five—until the Condor was headed almost east to hold its southeast path along the beach. The rain increased no less than did the wind, until it seemed to spray upon the cockpit glass and form a driving mist that shut out vision. There was static in that rain, and in the scuds they pounded through; the radio picked up the minute discharge of each drop and amplified it, until the earphones were filled with the screech of an atomic bombardment.

"No rough stuff yet," Collie shouted to his flying mate. "If this is a hurricane, I don't see how it could tear things up. It must be a spread-out thunderstorm. The real blow must have swung north-east—so it'd miss our route entirely."

Martin nodded. "Pascal said it would do that. What we're running into may be the outer edge of it." His words were small against the pounding of the rain. "This isn't bad—but it's not like any thunderstorm I ever saw down—"

Just then they hit the wind!

There was no warning. The Condor had been riding fairly smoothly, crabbing to maintain its track above the beach, and then suddenly it was engulfed. Rain, the like of which Collie McGinus had never thought possible, beat back upon them, bore them down for an instant before the wind crashed at them from below. The climb-indicator flickered down and then went up. The plane was blasted high into the scudding, racing clouds. The dim gray of the beach completely disappeared in rain and mist.

BUT the upthrust did not hold them. It slapped upward, a violent blow, and the plane reacted; then the gust abandoned them and let them fall. Something twanged, distinctly audible above the roar of the struggling engines, against the shrieking of the wires and the boom of pounding rain. A wing went down; and Collie, watching his turn-indicator grimly, tried to lift it. He could not do so. The wing seemed held in that position. And then suddenly it came free from the clutches of swirling air, and the

other one went down with a sickening snap that made it difficult to keep one's seat.

Collie shouted: "Call Miami! See what's happening down there!"

Martin nodded, started hammering on the key; but the pounding of the up-and-down thrusts made his efforts almost futile, for when he tried to send, his hand was smashed down on the key, or lifted off of it in such a way that he could not maintain the sequence of his dots and dashes.

AS each impact of the wind returned, the Condor shuddered. The ground was gone, completely blotted out by rain and clouds. With one thought paramount, Collie tried to make a slow turn to the left and come around, to seek escape. This was no thunderstorm! This, beyond all doubt, was the full force of a hurricane! In all his years of flying, Collie McGinus had never seen even an approach to the violence of the air, the quantity of the rain that fell, the foreboding blackness of the racing clouds. It seemed impossible for the plane to remain intact under the strains imposed upon it. The whole thing was beyond belief. And Collie cursed himself for starting out, for letting Channing be the cause of this.

He heard just then, as he was making the beginning of his turn, inching the plane around and fighting desperately to hold it near some semblance of ordered flight, a terror-stricken voice in his ear. For a fraction of a second he glanced back. Hollis Perkins stood there in the doorway of the cockpit, and blood trickled from a long wound in her forehead.

"The seats!" she shouted. "They've all come loose from the floor! The passengers are everywhere, with nothing to hold to. They're just—they're just bouncing around!"

He nodded curtly, turning his head so that he could still watch the instruments and yet speak into her ear. "Trying to get back! Take care of them the best you can!" The girl dived back into the cabin; a gust slammed into the plane and knocked her to the floor; she got up and fought to reach a woman sitting in the rear, who was unconscious from a blow upon her head.

Martin, white-faced, drenched from water that sprayed through the seams of the window, persisted in his efforts with the radio. At last he yelled;



Hollis Perkins
shouted: "That
wire—look out
there!"

"Transmitter's working, but can't raise 'em! Something wrong! Do you suppose this thing has hit Miami and blown the station down?"

"God help us!" Collie replied grimly.

Hollis Perkins was in the doorway once more, shouting, screaming for attention. "That wire—on the right wing! Look out there!"

It was on Martin's side, and he looked, and turned quickly back to Collie. "Inner bay flying-wire snapped. Whipping about—almost in the prop! I'll have to get it!"

Collie, his compass dancing, the controls seeming to try to surge and break out of his grasp at each repeated shock, looked quickly. A wire almost behind the right engine had snapped off at the bottom, a thick wire, big as a man's index finger at the coupling, but streamlined in shape in the center, was whipping and flaying the top cowling of the engine. Too heavy to be blown by the wind, each jolt of the airplane flung it forward. At any moment it might leap into the grinding propeller, putting the prop and engine out of commission instantly.

And this was an occasion when both engines must function or the plane would crash. The wild Atlantic might be beneath them now, or the Everglades; Collie had not the least idea of where he was. If an engine quit, he could not fly with the other one, for down-thrusts of the wind would rob him of altitude very rapidly.

He shouted to Martin:

"Can you fly this crate blind in this mess—while I get out there?"

Martin shook his head. "Afraid to try it. I'll get out on the wing!" He slipped out of his seat, clutching the door facing to hold his footing, moved back into the wild disorder of the cabin. Hollis Perkins was sitting on the floor, a bandage in her hands and a bloody-faced woman sprawled across her knees. A knot of women, huddled in the rear of the cabin, clutched each other for support against the whipping surges of the plane; and here men, singly and in pairs, grasped the edges of the windows with white-knuckled fingers. But Martin saw this only in a glance, in a kind of haze. His job, dangerous beyond imagination, lay outside upon the wing; and he wondered if he could hang on out there with the airplane flouncing in the air like a cork upon a storm-whipped sea.

He opened the window carefully, and a flailing spray of rain slapped him in the face. He got one leg outside, and hooked it around a cross-brace wire between the motor nacelle and the fuselage. Then, an inch at a time, he worked out to the wing, while in apprehension he watched the wire that whipped back and forth across the motor cowling.

A bump came suddenly, and his feet were thrown into the air. His grip upon the wire was all that prevented him from being blown away. The rain, like pellets of hot lead, blasted back in a constant fusillade that seemed to grind away the flesh upon his face. He could not see except by shielding his eyes with one hand, and looking sidewise. The drag-wires ate into his hands and brought quick blood, but Martin clung on, unconscious of all pain but that acid beating of the rain, forgetting, in the desperation of this mission, the fears which earlier had almost paralyzed his muscles. He worked out into the prop wash, where the pressure of the blasting pellets seemed magnified a dozen times. He could not stand, and it seemed impossible, in the greater surges of the wind, to maintain his grip and even stay upon the wing.

YET he fought doggedly, for the lives of all of them depended on his fight, and summoned that reserve energy and strength of desperation which some men have at their command. He wrapped one leg about a strut and braced himself and struggled with the wire. He got it in his hand, and a gust came and tore it free again.

And trying to hold it, Guy Martin lost his grip and fell.

A blistering exhaust-pipe saved him. He clutched wildly, his mind a frenzy of horror, gripped the stack by accident and luck; and while skin and flesh on the palm of his hand broiled to the bone, he pulled himself to safety. He felt no pain. Grimly he set to work again to get that wire back to a place where he could make it fast.

HE got it finally, while the rain puffed his face into a blister, while he left flakes of burned skin from his hand upon the wire. He wrapped it securely about a strut, bent it so that the wind would hold it there. Then he turned about, facing that savage rain again, and worked his way along the wing toward the cabin window where Hollis Perkins and the other passengers stood in white-faced agony and watched him. They pulled him in and shut the window. And Guy Martin waved away their ministrations and staggered to the cockpit and sat down across the aisle from Collie.

There, getting his safety-belt about his thighs, he relaxed a little, uttered a shuddering laugh bordering on hysteria.

Collie shouted: "Great work!"—and went on fighting the controls, his legs pumping on the rudder pedals against the flicking variations of the turn-indicator needle. There was a grimness in his face that was strange for him.

"How soon'll we get out—get back?" Martin yelled, and looked down, for the first time, at the white palm of his hand.

Collie McGinus shook his head for answer. He was afraid to say what he knew already, almost afraid to admit that he realized what their danger was. With tense and straining eyes he watched the instruments. The turn-indicator was the thing, but he glanced at least once every second to the compass. The compass was the instrument that worried him. He could not get a reading on it! He could not determine the direction of his flight—whether the Condor was still boring on into the hurricane, or coming out! And he would never know, until a rift came in the clouds, until the danger had been passed.

For the air was so violent that the compass would not stop its oscillations. Properly damped for normal air, the violence of this flight kept it in constant agitation. Repeatedly it swung, spun from one reading to another. Re-



Slowly he worked out onto the wing, while he watched the wire that whipped back and forth.

peatedly it stopped, and Collie got a reading—never two the same—and then it swung and spun again. While Martin worked on the wing, Collie had discovered this; and now he knew that he was trapped, that it would be the sheerest luck if he maintained straight flight in any direction long enough to break from this boiling mass of wind and cloud that threatened every minute to destroy all of them. Panic lurked at the outer edges of his thoughts, and the thoughts came jerkily and seemed unreal. Would the airplane stand the battering it was taking now? How large an area could this hurricane be raging over? Would it be possible, by flying on and on, guiding only by the indications of that flicking needle, to run out of it? And if he did, what might it gain? The Atlantic lay in wait for him upon the east; the Everglades, containing even worse death, upon the west. And at any moment structural failure of the plane itself, strained already far beyond the greatest loads for which it had been built, might dash them down and spew them on the earth.

He said to Martin, yelling above the pound of the rain and the blast of the shrieking wind, "Try to get Miami! Got to get it! Watch that compass just a second, and you'll understand! I can't tell which way we're flying!"

The co-pilot, seeming numbed to this new danger, impervious to added pain of thought or body, nodded dumbly, started pounding on the key. Collie battled with the rudder pedals and the ailerons to keep the plane upright. He heard Hollis Perkins shouting in his ear,

heard indistinctly a male voice break sharp in fear behind her.

"Mr. McGinus," she was screaming, "you *must* go back! The passengers are going mad! You'll kill them—they can't hold to anything! A man just struck his head on the ceiling and I can't bring him to!"

"Trying to get back!" he snapped, and added tersely: "Do the best you can with them."

FROM the spill of his vision he saw her head withdraw. And then a man, vicious, wild-eyed and disheveled, came up to take her place. The plane took a downthrust at that moment, and the fellow clutched wildly for support. In doing so he knocked Collie's cap forward, in spite of the earphones holding it, and for an instant Collie could not see.

He shoved the cap back with a jerking sweep of his hand, and when he looked now at the turn-indicator, he found it full over to the right, and saw, by the artificial horizon, that the wing was down. So he fought to right the plane, and did not hear the man's excited exclamations. Finally he could glance back, and saw Channing's well-fed face behind him, Channing's bruised face, drained of blood and courage, with wild eyes almost starting from their sockets.

"You fool!" Channing croaked. "Don't try to go any farther! Take me back from here! Are you trying to kill me—kill us all?"

"I'd like to!" Collie bellowed. "Get out of here! I'm trying to get back now!" He flung a fist backward, pushed Channing from the passageway, turned desperately to the flying of the plane.

A faint, thin, broken sound came to his earphones; and instantly with one hand he pressed the receiver closer to his ear and strained to listen. The static in the rain had passed sometime ago—unnoticed in the pressure of events. He could hear now fairly well.

"Di-da-da-da-da—di-di-di-di-dit."

It was repeated almost endlessly, and then Miami's identification signal broke through: "*Fifteen from Miami. Trip fifteen from Miami. ARK—go ahead.*"

"Got him!" Martin shouted. "But what good's that going to do? He can't put out a beacon signal! He can't guide us in through this mess!"

"Get weather!" Collie ordered brusque-

ly. "Step on it. Give him a distress signal."

The weather came through. "*Miami, overcast, 800, 10, NW 18, 74, 62, 2939.*"

That settled it. This roaring storm was actually a hurricane! A hurricane, which, lost to weather observatories that waited anxiously for word of it, had swung upward from its predicted course of travel and cut into the coast of Florida. Miami was now feeling the westward travel of the center of the storm.

But going somewhere was the thing that frightened Collie McGinus. The air was turbulent and without the intermittent lulls that thunderstorms provide. He had no chance to read his compass and be sure of what direction he was heading. Four times he had obtained a reading which he thought was accurate, and turned to what he thought was north to retreat from the storm; and each time, within a space of seconds, had found that he was not going north, but east, or west, and one time, south.

"What now?" Martin shouted. "Do you know our gas is getting low? We've only got an hour left!"

The pilot had, for the time, forgotten gas, and what running out of gas would surely mean. It could only mean one thing, one certain thing, and that was death for all of them. Eighteen men and women who had started on this ride for pleasure, trusting the ability and judgment of the crew. And Hollis Perkins and Guy Martin, just as trusting of the pilot, but more cognizant of the hazards of the flight.

Collie snapped: "Tell Miami to call me steadily—call *fifteen* steadily. Tell him not to break that call for anything, for anybody. Make it plain we're in trouble—big trouble! That's the only chance we have."

"That won't help us," the co-pilot objected. "We can't find Miami by his calling us in code and—"

"You tell him what I said!" Collie bellowed. "There's no time to sit up here and argue! You do what I tell you!"

MARTIN obeyed. The big man sat taut at his controls. Hollis Perkins came forward again and pleaded with him to take them back. He said to her: "Go to the baggage-compartment; find the tool-kits. Get me some wire—about forty feet of it. And hurry up!"

The girl fled. Collie sat considering this most desperate thing he was about to do. It meant being able to fly south, to keep a heading on Miami. And it meant, in doing that, to fly on through the worst part of this hurricane! He wondered if the plane would stand it, wondered if there was gas enough to get them through. It seemed, while sitting there and soberly considering the advisability of it, like madness; and yet it was the only chance he had. He could not go back, for the static of the clouds at the edge of the storm area would incapacitate his radio. He had to go on, on south, through the churning wind and snarling rain, perhaps to safety or perhaps to the end of everything. Since it was the only chance, it was a chance worth taking.

THE hostess returned a minute later and announced that there was in the tool-kit only a small roll of safety wire. She handed it to him.

"It'll do," he told her. "Now, take care of your passengers. We're going through this storm. We're going to Miami!"

Under Collie's curt direction, Guy Martin, despite an injured hand that now was a mass of searing pain, strung a loop antenna from the nose of the cockpit back to the passageway of the cabin, and attached the lead-in to the radio receiver. For insulators he used the composition buttons from Hollis Perkins' uniform, and strung the wire through the holes. And then he tuned and listened for Miami. No sound came. He trimmed the set for this shorter antenna that they now were using, and still no fragment of code came into their ear-phones.

Collie started a wide, slow turn, a difficult turn against the jarring impacts of the wind. It seemed to last forever, with the cudgeling blast of air upsetting their position, trying to tear the plane apart.

Then suddenly a faint sound came, which, as the turn progressed, increased in volume until it was distinctly audible.

"*Di-da-da-da-da—di-di-di-di-dit.*" It went on and on, steadily, with the rhythm of the operator's swing, until it was interrupted by the call of the station, after which the plane call began again.

It grew, then began to fade. Collie straightened up the plane, swung back until the sound was at its loudest.

"We're headed south!" he said, show-

ing more excitement than he had at any time since this fateful flight had started.

"We've got a bearing on Miami!"

"How do you know?" Martin queried. "I never saw a thing like this tried out before!"

"Directional effect of the antenna! A looped wire like what you just put up brings in the strongest signals when it's pointed toward the station where the signals come from. Now, boy, get ready for a ride!"

The signal held. Each time it faded, Collie swung back to bring it in again. The rain drove down at them; the wind pummeled them unmercifully, until it seemed that every strut and wire, every member, of the giant plane must give way beneath the strain.

Minutes dragged by, while the storm raged without a moment's intermission. The engines drummed; the propellers snarling into the gusts of wind. Collie sent Guy Martin back to Hollis Perkins to have his hand dressed; for the hand, flesh swelling, was entirely useless now. And when that task had been accomplished, the co-pilot helped the hostess in holding back the passengers from the panic which threatened them with each bump and shock which the plane survived in the hurricane. They were like the grains of rice in a baby's rattle, for with nothing to grasp to maintain their stability, each shock threw them to the ceiling, or to their knees upon the floor. The cabin, and everything inside the cabin, was a wreck. Chairs, uprooted from their anchors, lay in grotesque positions on the floor, while water from the crashing rain ran in rivulets back and forth with each shift of the plane among the chairs and among the men and women huddled on the floor.

COLLIE, alone in the cockpit, headphones on his ears, watched his instruments and listened to those steady signals. They grew louder as the minutes passed, even as the storm became more powerful. At times the airplane was entirely out of his control, threshing in an orgy of wind such as only one or two living airmen in this country ever saw. Somehow it rode on through.

There came a final shudder, a last, devastating blow; and then as suddenly as it had come, the worst violence of the wind was past. Yet still the air was rough and choppy, still the rain fell in torrents of gray water, still the scud and clouds maintained them in their clutches.

But Collie idled his engines somewhat, and started down. He reduced the volume of his radio, for it was coming so loudly that it hurt his ears. His altimeter showed five hundred feet, and he could read his compass now. He went on down, while the signals of the radio grew in volume rapidly.

At two hundred feet he had seen no signs of earth; yet he knew well that he was somewhere near the station. With the microphone he called for weather, and some seconds later the monotone of code was broken and the operator spoke in voice: "Miami, overcast, light rain, ceiling 600, visibility three miles, wind West 37, temperature 72, dewpoint 67, barometer 2925 break. Hurricane of considerable intensity expected here within one hour."

"Okay!" said Collie. "Are you sure the ceiling is six hundred feet?"

"About that, yes," the operator said.

"You are very close, Fifteen."

"I'm coming down!" Collie declared.

"Stand by for me."

He could not understand why his altimeter should read two hundred feet, yet he could not see the ground. He started mushing. Then he remembered.

"I must have been so scared I couldn't think!" he muttered caustically. "Barometric pressure, naturally." The altimeter, as the airplane went through the storm into an area of lower pressure, of course indicated a higher altitude.

With this reassurance, he cut the guns and started in a glide. He broke through, and found, below him, an expanse of open country with sparse trees bending in the northwest wind. The northern end of Miami lay upon his left, and Biscayne Bay was just behind him. He must, he thought grimly, have been over the Atlantic for some time. But now, sure of where he was, he went on, his mind filled with vast relief; and at last he saw the field. . . .

The storm struck soon after they had put the Condor in the hangar, but they were safe now, for the building had been built for storms like this. But they were imprisoned there, unable to reach town. They dressed the wounds of the injured, had coffee and sandwiches, and were as comfortable as possible through the night. When morning came, they went out to view the ruin in that curving pathway of the wind. Young Channing, his head wrapped in a bandage, looked in awe at what lay about them. And Mr. Channing had no word to say.

Sailors Have Brains

A brief bit from the log-book of two able seamen stranded in the strange port Chicago.

By FRANK
SCHINDLER

Illustrated by Margery Stocking

THE big bozo comes over to our table and says, "Youse aint got no ladies. You can't stay here."

And then I says: "Who the devil says we can't stay here?"

And the next thing, we was riding around in a taxi—and after I got things right, I says to Jake: "Gosh, Jake, that stuff must've had a awful wallop!"

And Jake says: "I'll say he did!"

Then we bumped the hackman on the head and told him to pull up to the curb. So we gave him some money and got out. We stood on the corner and I says: "Where are we, Jake?"

"We are some place, maybe in Little Italy," says Jake.

"Well, if we sing something and somebody yells at us in some language," I suggested, "then we can tell where we are by the language. If in Polish, then we are west of Goose Island. If in Yiddish, then we are maybe on Roosevelt Road or Maxwell Street. If in Chinese, then we are somewhere around Twenty-second and Wentworth."

"But we can't sing Chinese," argues Jake.

And I says: "We don't sing Chinese. We sing in King's English."

So we started to sing, and a guy walked out and he says: "Aint you got no ladies?"

And I says: "No, we aint got no ladies."

"Aint you a-scared?" says the guy.



"Naw, we aint a-scared," says Jake.

"Well, you better be a-scared," says the guy. "We're gonna put a guy on the spot here, and you're standin' right in the way."

"Oh, you wan' us to get out of the way," I says. "Sure, kid, we'll take a walk and see the sights. Come on, Jake."

"So long, guys," says the guy. "If you walk around here, you should have some ladies with you."

We didn't want no ladies. We walked down a block and turned a corner. We met a copper.

"Hello," says Jake. "You aint got no lady, have you?"

"No, I have no lady," says the copper.

"Aint you a-scared?" I says.

"Why should I be a-scared?" says the copper.

"I don't know," says I. "A guy asked us if we weren't a-scared and we says, no, we're not a-scared; and he says, well, you better be a-scared, because we're gonna put a guy on the spot here and you're standin' right in the way."

"What kind of a lookin' guy was he?" says the copper.

"Well," says I, "he was a thick-set guy, a little shorter than me. He had

a scar on the starboard side of his pan, right along the nose; and his nose slanted off toward the port side of his pan."

"Was he slightly cock-eyed in the right eye?" says the copper.

"Yeah, slightly cock-eyed, with a machine-gun under one elbow."

"That's him," the copper nods.

"That's who?" says Jake.

"Scar-pan Appoggiatura," says the copper.

"I can't say that," says Jake.

"I don't want to say it," says I. "And who are they gonna bump off, Ossifer—Ossifer—Officer?"

"There comes the Sergeant," says the copper. "Maybe he knows."

"It's just as I told you, Dan," says the Sergeant to the copper. "I think they're going to bump off Slug Shluza. They're still fawning on him in the Three Deuces; guess they want him to go out and take a ride. But where?"

"These guys know," says the copper.

So we told the Sergeant what the guy says to us; and then I says, "Why do we hafta walk around with ladies?"

"If you have ladies with you, then they know you're not coppers," says the Sergeant. "So they're round the corner, hey? Well, the papers are yelling about putting down crime and the coppers are laying down on the job. Oh, yeah! They kill one rat and the rest of the rats remain to gnaw at the roots of society, or whatever they call it. If you drunks were coppers, what would you do in such a situation?"

"We'd let them knock off the rat, but we'd be around somewhere to knock off the rats that knocked off the rat," says I. "And then we would be the brown-haired boys with the newspapers, and maybe we would get the hundred-dollar reward at the end of the month, and they'd maybe call us heroes."

"Oh, yes," says the Sergeant. "Better to be a live copper than a dead hero. We have ladies at home—and kids, besides. But if we're not too late, it's worth trying. If we can shove off these rats, maybe we'll live longer. I'll pull the box and pass the word along and see what happens." Then he made us a suggestion. We said: "All right."

SO he walked up from the way he had come, while the copper went to the corner and went away from the corner where the rats had the ambush. Jake and me went to the corner, crossed the street and went straight up for one block.

Then we turned left for a block, and again turned left, and came back to the opposite corner from this ambush.

We wobbled across the street, with our arms around each other, and we started to sing "Casey Jones," not too loud.

THEN a peevish voice says: "Geez, will you guys get out of here before I spank you down?"

It's Scar-pan again.

"Aw, you wanna fight, hey?" says Jake. "But if you fight, you'll crab your spottin' of the guy you're spottin' for."

"If it wasn't for that, I'd shoot you guys right now," said Scar-pan. "Damn you, go home!"

"We aint got no home," I says. "We're sailors. Yes, we are, honest! *'Sailing, sailing, over the bounding main; many brave hearts are asleep in the deep—'*"

"You're going to sleep with a lily in your hand, guy," interrupts Scar-pan, and motions with his arm. "Stop singin', you fool!"

Two more guys come out. Oh, were they tough guys! They looked like a couple of cutthroat Lascars.

"Do we shove you, or do you go without shoving?" asked Scar-pan.

"We don't need nobody to shove us," says I with dignity. "We're goin', kid. Kin we come back if we get a couple of ladies?"

"No! Stay out of here! Now, git!" says Scar-pan.

So we walked around awhile but pretty soon we drifted back to the same corner. And again Scar-pan eases out from between two buildings. I guess he was mad, by the way he stood with his fists on his hips.

"I thought I told you guys to stay out of here," says he.

"We're goin'," says Jake; "but we got to go by here to get where we're going."

"Where *are* you going?" says Scar-pan.

"I dunno," says I, "but we're on our way—"

"Shut up," snapped Scar-pan. "Of all the dumb drunks, you guys take the hemstitched pork-chop!"

"You can't hemstitch a pork-chop, kid," Jake argues. "Even where we came from they can't hemstitch a pork-chop; an' when it comes to hemstitchin', them people is the greatest hemstitchers."

"Yeah? And where did you come from?"

"We came from Antwerp, Belgium, on a Swedish tramp, with a load of haywire and German crockery."

"Can that bologny," says Scar-pan.

"Don't you read the papers?" says I. "Didn't ya see the pitcher of our ship in the newspaper, as we come up the river? We're some guys! We got interviewed by reporters an' our skipper was given a gold watch—"

"And you guys right away have to go out and get stewed," says Scar-pan. "You guys aint got no sense."

"There's no sense to the hooch they sell here," says Jake. "We went in a place and asked the guy for some Tom Collins and a sidecar. After we had six each, the guy got sore because we had no ladies with us, and they threw us out. Why did they throw us out?"

"You didn't spend enough jack," says Scar-pan. "If you would've had ladies with you, you would've spent twice as much, and maybe more."

"See, we should've had ladies with us," says I.

Scar-pan got so interested in our troubles that he forgot what he was there for; the next thing we knew one of his gorillas says, "*Hist!* Up the stem."

Up the stem came a big black car.

SCAR-PAN slammed Jake in the stomick with the machine-gun, and Jake doubled up.

Then Scar-pan thumped the muzzle of the gun against my forehead and I slid over in a heap. But I could still see what was going on.

There was a crash of shots, the jingle of breaking glass, and the car slid to a stop and the driver dived overboard and fell in the street. A big guy with a gat popped out, and he was shooting. The machine-guns were going like mad. Then he grabbed at his chest and fell on his face.

And then lights flashed from all over. From two corners came beams of light. A beam of light shot between the two buildings. From two windows two more light beams shot into the street. Scar-pan threw down his machine-gun and started to run. I grabbed him by his feet, and he spilled on his face just as a shotgun blast sailed over his head.

Somewhere more shotguns and police pistols were crashing out. A tough guy hurdled us and doubled backward while still in the air. He hit on his back like a log, with a load of slugs in him.

Scar-pan turned over and kicked me in the face. I tried to grab him, but the Sergeant was over me.



Scar-pan started to run. I grabbed him by his feet, and he spilled on his face.

"Let him run, you fool!" he hollered. So I let go, and Scar-pan hit the grit. "Halt!" the Sergeant yelled, and then fired after Scar-pan. Scar-pan whirled around, slow, like a top, five or six times, and then ran down like a clock and fell over. It was all over except picking up the pieces.

Jake sat up and rubbed his stomick. "We should of brought ladies with us," says he.

"You should of brought some sense with you," says the Sergeant. "I don't know whether you guys are just dumb or, like all drunks, have a guardian angel with you."

"Dumb, nothing!" says Jake, getting up and rubbing his stomick. "We're sober, now. We knew you guys wanted to get these guys; so as long as this punk thought we were stewed, we gave him a lot of salve, got to talking to him and he forgot all about his business. *He* was the one that was dumb."

"I'll be damned!" says the Sergeant. "—Lieutenant!" he calls. "Come on over and shake hands with a couple of nervy bozos."

"That was mighty fine of you boys to keep Scar-pan interested while we got those lights fixed," says the Lieutenant.

"Get 'em all?" says I.

"All in, and the votes are all counted," says he.

"And where are we?" says I.

"Are you strangers here?" says he.

"No, we know the town, but we came in on that Swede tramp today. Down the St. Lawrence, the Welland Canal and the Great Lakes. Our ship is berthed in the north branch of the Chicago River. How do we get back?"

"Why, walk up one block, and then turn left and go two and you'll come to an Elevated station," he explained.

"That's jake," says I. "If it's an Elevated station, that's all the bearings we need. Thanks."

"Don't mention it," says he. "The pleasure is all mine."

BUT we stuck around long enough to see the coppers load six defunct tough guys in the wagons.

"They should've brought shrouds," says Jake.

"And a couple for you," says the Sergeant, and grins. "Gosh, I should have known you were sailors; I used to be one. Sailors have brains."

"Let's go," says Jake, "before he insults us."

The Fordyce Murders

By CLARENCE HERBERT NEW

*A fascinating story of strange crime
and able detective work by the au-
thor of "Free Lances in Diplomacy."*

COLTON had been admiring the girl as he came down Regent Street a few paces behind her. Presently he also noticed that a man of somewhat foreign appearance was tacking first to one side and then to the other in what evidently was a close inspection of the girl's profile. Once as she stopped to look at something in a shop-window, he closed in to look at the reflection of her face in a mirror.

When a group gathered at the corner, waiting for the traffic-officer's whistle to cross the street, the man wriggled his way to a position directly behind the girl and slipped his hand inside his coat.

Colton, in the course of his engineering experience in Latin and Asiatic countries, had not infrequently seen weapons drawn—and was fairly certain as to what the man intended to do. Quickly elbowing his way through the closely packed group, he reached the fellow's side just as that hand came out gripping a tarnished stiletto which had, none-the-less, a point like a needle—and he grasped the wrist with a *jujitsu* pressure upon a certain nerve which paralyzed the fingers instantly. Giving a muttered curse of pain, the would-be murderer wrenched the wrist loose from the American's grasp with unexpected strength, ducked under the elbow of a big man beyond, and was out of the crowd on the farther side, running across the street at considerable risk among the oncoming traffic—disappearing from sight before Colton could get within reach of him again.

The stiletto had dropped upon the sidewalk—and the incident was over so quickly that nobody quite understood just what had happened. The escaping man had dropped the weapon—several had seen it in his hand—but whether he had intended to use it upon the fine-looking man who had compelled him to

drop it, or upon somebody else, was less clear.

Hearing the commotion just behind her, Kate Fordyce turned in time to see the man wrench himself loose and escape. She caught a glance from the tall sunburned man whose appearance she instinctively liked, and she asked:

"What happened? What was the man doing?"

"Well, I'd been watching him for two or three minutes, and I'm pretty sure I know—but I've not the slightest proof of it except that stiletto on the pavement. Let's walk on up the street so that the bobby won't be asking us questions when he sees it! Concerning what he was up to—do you mind if I ask you a question? Of course, if you object in the least, I'll apologize and take myself off—"

The girl quietly subjected him to a searching glance—and nodded.

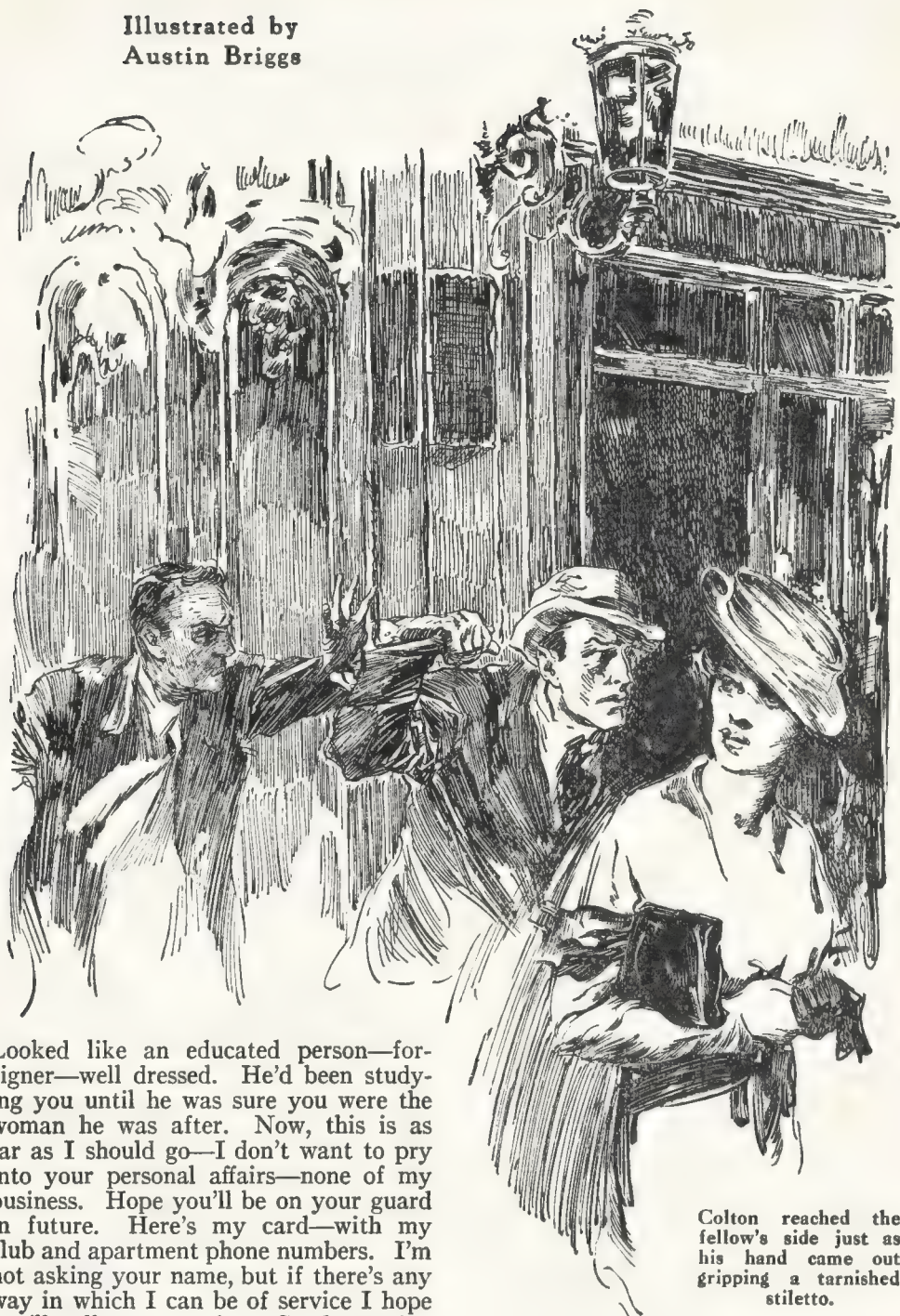
"Very well. You don't appear to be a person who'd be deliberately offensive."

"Thank you. After an occurrence of this sort, one is not supposed to say anything that would make you nervous. On the other hand, if I don't say it, you'll not be on your guard against something more of the sort in future—and that risk justifies my question. Can you think of any man in London, or anywhere else, who might deliberately try to harm you, for any reason?"

"Why, I fancy not! Rather an odd question, isn't it?"

"Not in this case. The man who stood behind you in the group at the curb deliberately drew that stiletto from under his left arm—had it almost against your back so that it would have gone through your heart—and was preparing to stumble as if the crowd were pushing him off his balance, forcing the knife into you with his weight added to the thrust.

Illustrated by
Austin Briggs



Looked like an educated person—foreigner—well dressed. He'd been studying you until he was sure you were the woman he was after. Now, this is as far as I should go—I don't want to pry into your personal affairs—none of my business. Hope you'll be on your guard in future. Here's my card—with my club and apartment phone numbers. I'm not asking your name, but if there's any way in which I can be of service I hope you'll call me or write. Good morning—and—be careful."

FOR two weeks the girl considered the incident from different viewpoints. She was living independently, with nobody to criticise or interfere with anything she might choose to do. Finally she purchased tickets for two good seats

Colton reached the fellow's side just as his hand came out gripping a tarnished stiletto.

in the stalls at His Majesty's, and sent him one, with the suggestion that he meet her there—simply signing the note: *"One who is under considerable obligation to you, and feels you are entitled to more recognition of the fact than may have been evident at the time."* When she entered the theater, he was there.

"Er—did you give that occurrence any further thought?" he asked.

"Naturally—but I can't place a single person I ever met who has anything against me or would do such a thing. I'm Kate Fordyce, and I live with a friend in a Chelsea apartment—Lenox Gardens. She's with a firm of stock-brokers in the city; I have a berth as secretary to one of the Tory Members—Mr. Jason Wilberson, M. P. My father was a younger son who went into the church—his brother, who has a title, got a deanery for him in one of the cathedral towns, so he was able to put by a bit of his stipend, which came to me at his death. My mother's people were 'County'—in Herts. Together, they left me three hundred a year, upon which I could live comfortably enough if I had to—I have no sisters or brothers. Another uncle went into trade—and made quite a pot. His son has incorporated the works with a reliable manager and board, of which he is chairman—so he hunts big game and goes where he pleases. Not married, and no brothers or sisters. Frank is a very decent sort—popular with everyone. Aside from His Lordship and Frank, I've no relatives left except one second cousin,—liked well enough socially, but not the type I care about,—and a few fourth cousins."

"On good terms with your uncle and your cousin?"

"Oh, very much so—each has asked me to make my home with him. But that would mean that I'd be under obligations—and one prefers being independent when it is possible. I visit them two or three times a year—we're the best of friends, really."

"H-m-m—and your employer? Is he enough of a force to make ugly enemies?"

"Well—he is, and he isn't. One of the best debaters in the House—keen wit—a splendid organizer. But he doesn't let himself down into the muck of active politics. Doubtless there are several who'd like to see him out of Parliament entirely—but I can't see how that would touch me in any way. No—if anything is tried a second time, and I get out of it alive, I'll prob'ly think of some one who might be responsible."

AFTER that evening, the acquaintance naturally progressed until she was dining and going to various places with Colton once or twice a week. He found himself quite at home in the Lenox Gardens flat, well liked by her friend, Cicely

Manning—and was fortunately situated so that his professional work as expert consulting engineer permitted him to go and come as he pleased. So the friendship drifted along pleasantly to an evening when she was dining with him at the Royal Court Hotel, which had just opened a popular new grill room.

KATE FORDYCE was in a gay holiday mood as they joined a group at the doors of the grill room, waiting for the head-waiter to give them tables—the group being closely packed together in an effort to survey the room and choose a place where they wished to sit. While chatting with Colton, she felt a pin pricking her left thigh, and casually swept a hand back over her skirt to locate the head of it. One often picks up a pin in the folds of one's clothing from the upholstery of a chair or sofa; indeed, the incident was so slight that, not finding the pin, she forgot it the next moment, as they were escorted to a corner table.

While glancing through the menu, Colton and Miss Fordyce chatted pleasantly over favorite dishes. Gradually he became aware that she was saying less—looking a bit distraught. Quietly he asked: "What's wrong, Kate? Something's troubling you."

"Why, I don't—just know! I've a frightfully odd sensation—not exactly faint, but rather numb—dopy—"

Colton reached out a long arm and grabbed a waiter, hurrying by.

"The lady is ill, waiter! Fetch some King William whisky just as soon as you can get it here! Hurry, man!"

The waiter made no mistake as to the sort of man who was giving him orders—and was back in three minutes. Kate sipped the whisky, neat, as Colton told her to, with a drink of cold water afterward—while he closely watched her. A trifle more color showed in her face.

"Did that help any?"

"Why, I think it may. I don't feel quite so dead inside—but—really, Jim, I'm afraid there's something wrong! Oh, I hate to spoil our dinner this way!"

"Guess that settles it, girl. Something serious has happened—we'll have to get busy on the jump! One of my oldest and best friends is Doctor Samuel Adams, of Boston—very well known as a specialist—who lives here in Redburn Street, Chelsea. We can reach the house in less than five minutes from here, in a taxi—and I'd like to have him go over you thoroughly. If there's any man in Lon-

don who'll put you right in the shortest possible time, he's the one—met him at the club for lunch, so I know he'll be at home, working in his laboratory. Can you make it as far as the cab with my assistance?"

From the Royal Court in Sloane Square to Redburn Street is but a few blocks—they were in Doctor Adams' consulting-room not more than six minutes later. He listened to Colton's brief summing-up of her symptoms—tested her pulse and respiration—looked closely at the pupils of her eyes. Then he asked:

"Miss Fordyce—during the last half-hour, can you recall a sensation as if a pin were sticking into you, somewhere? Think!"

"Why, yes—in that crowd, while we stood waiting for a table. I felt over my skirt for the head of the pin, but couldn't find it—must have dropped out, I fancy."

"Hmph! . . . That's about what your symptoms indicate—but I couldn't have been sure, without that detail. Fortunately, I have a serum in the laboratory which I think is just the remedy for this attack—we'll try it, and watch the effect closely. I've a couple of rooms upstairs which are fitted up in as thoroughly sanitary and comfortable a way as you'd find in any hospital; I frequently keep a patient here under observation. We'll carry you up there."

TWO minutes later, she was stretched on a comfortable bed—conscious, but drowsy and faint.

"I can't risk total anesthesia with you because I don't know how much your heart might stand under these conditions—but I'll anesthetize a four-inch space on your thigh, locally, so that you'll scarcely notice what I'm doing. Then I'll cut in fairly deep and see how thoroughly I can check the damage."

With a clean incision down through the muscular tissue exactly under a tiny perforation of skin which already had an aureole of infection around it, he found a line of darkened and disintegrating blood-vessels, which he cauterized; then he injected the serum in the deepest part of the cut, and sponged it with antiseptic.

"Just by a pure fluke, that needle missed one of the arteries by a sixteenth of an inch," he observed. "Had it gone through the wall of it, the stuff would have been pretty well up to your heart by this time and you'd be leaving us, in a perfectly painless way. As it is—with any sort of luck, I'll have you walking

about soon. The cut will make you a bit lame for a few days—after that, you won't notice it."

The girl was asleep when he finished—but her respiration was noticeably more normal. After calling in one of his nurses who lived in the neighborhood, he went down to his study with Colton.

"YOU think she's out of danger now, Doctor?" the younger man asked.

"Not by a damned sight! . . . It was touch-and-go when you got her here. Fifteen minutes more would have been too late! Some of the biggest specialists in London have laughed at me for carrying some of that serum about in my emergency-kit—on the ground that snakes don't, as a rule, jump up and bite folks on the streets of London. I've explained my reasons for doing it, but they don't take any stock in them—say I've been reading too many murder mysteries."

"You know, of course, that there are snake farms in Brazil and Honduras where venomous species from all over the world are collected, and various types of serum distilled from their poisons. Those serums are supplied to the medical profession everywhere—but unfortunately we have a few human fiends among us who extract the venom direct from the snakes themselves and use it raw, for experimentation, they say. Actually, they make large sums by selling it to prospective murderers in concentrated form when they want to put somebody out of the way without leaving a trace."

"I found disintegration of the blood in Miss Fordyce's muscular tissue—but I can't tell you, nor can any other physician, just what poison produced it. It acted to me like albuminous snake-venom. I hadn't a second to waste, and but one type of serum here in London—so I had to take the chance. Looks now as if I were right—but a lot depends upon her constitution and her general resistance, which, I'd say, is fairly strong. There's one good feature about this: If ever she gets another dose of the same stuff it won't kill her—she'll be immunized. I think she's going to pull through all right, Jimmy. But it seems to me you haven't let me in on the whole story—yet. The brute who shoved that hypo into her had his mind bent upon producing a white-winged angel—not much question as to that. But why? What's she been doing to anybody?"

"Nothing! And this is the second attempt upon her life! I literally pulled

a stiletto away from her back the first time. If I hadn't known I could get here in four or five minutes, and that you'd be working at home this evening—she'd be dead right now!"

"But who the devil is trying to kill her—and why?"

"She can't imagine—nor can I! We've gone over her entire history together—can't spot a single likely person with any object whatsoever. She's confidential secretary to a Tory M. P.—but we can't imagine any political reason for ill-will. She has no money which might go to some one else. Her only living uncle is Viscount Fordyce of Chelmsford—fairly well off before the war, but now eaten up with taxes. Her cousin, in the Midlands, is worth possibly a million or more—manufacturing works—but if he dies unmarried, his mother's nieces will probably get whatever he leaves. We simply can't figure out anyone upon this green earth who'd have the slightest object in murdering her. Our best guess is some homicidal maniac."

"Hmph! . . . I'd rule that out—for a number of reasons. Do you know, Jim—this proposition rather intrigues me! Suppose the rich cousin already has made a will leaving her a good-sized lump of his money, and some clerk in his counselor's office has managed to read it? Suppose the Viscount has a respectable amount tucked away somewhere that nobody knows anything about?"

COLTON shook his head in puzzled fashion. "We've been over all that. Who gets it, in the event of her death?"

"Depends a lot upon the way the wills of those two men are drawn up—whom they might name as ultimate legatees in case they and the girl all die. They can leave their money to anyone they please, you know, as long as she is named in the wills for some small legacy. You can't ignore a direct heir, without a subsequent will-contest on the ground of undue influence or insanity—but you can leave one pound or one dollar and block the contest quite effectually. Do you know, Jim, the outstanding point to me is that those two relatives of hers—the Viscount and the cousin—are probably running the same risk of elimination that she is. As soon as she's able to be about again, I suggest that she give both of them the details of these two attacks upon herself—warn them to watch their step. This last affair is cold-blooded attempted murder, you know—not a question of it. As

such, it is very much the business of my two good friends at Scotland Yard—the Deputy Commissioner, Sir Edward Pelham, and Chief Inspector Beresford. Any objection to my giving them the main points—and discussing them? It's that much additional protection to Miss Fordyce, you know."

"No objection whatever, if they treat the communication as confidential. But don't tell 'em until we've asked Miss Fordyce; she's the one vitally interested."

Colton had telephoned Cicely Manning in Lenox Gardens as soon as they reached the Doctor's house, and the girl promptly brought over the clothes she knew Kate would need.

BY the next evening, Doctor Adams pronounced Kate out of danger—he said she could get up and walk about the house next day if she felt like it.

Viscount Fordyce, to whom Cicely had telephoned, had arrived from his estate in Devon. He was a handsome Englishman of sixty, who still rode to hounds. The attempts to murder his niece completely puzzled him—he couldn't figure out any more than she a possible object behind it, but was strongly impressed by the two outrages. After chatting with them for awhile, he said thoughtfully:

"Kate, whoever tried to do you in certainly expected to benefit materially by your death. In such circumstances, 'benefit' naturally means a large sum of money. It wouldn't be inherited from me, because all I could leave you would be an impoverished, overtaxed estate that would have to be partly sold off before you could live comfortably on the remainder. In Frank's case, he's likely to marry—or if not, his mother's nieces will get the bulk of what he has. So I can't imagine where any legacy worth while is coming to you. But I fancy you'll agree it's the correct move to block this murderous bounder so that he gains nothing by your death. If you make a will leaving everything you have to some friend who'll not turn up his or her nose at even your little three hundred a year, it would prevent anyone else benefiting by your death. You see that, of course? I'll send my solicitor around in the morning to draw it up for you."

"Why, yes, Uncle Vivian—I'll do that," Kate agreed. "The idea never would have occurred to me, because I've only my clothes, a few bits of furniture and three hundred a year to leave, and they naturally would go to you or Frank

as my nearest surviving relatives—but I see the point of having some entire outsider get them. It certainly would be a joke upon the brute who tried to kill me!”

When the Viscount left, his chauffeur drove him to a comfortable but unpretentious house in Surrey, where he found his solicitor, Angus M'Tavish, in smoking-jacket and slippers.

Lord Vivian never had been troubled with “nerves.” But he had M'Tavish type out another will for him, then and

a family matter—then both he and his nephew Francis Fordyce were in just as much danger of elimination as his niece—and he considered that the more likely of the two propositions. So impressed was he by this possibility that he put through a trunk call as soon as he



“Jim, there’s something wrong; I’ve a frightfully odd sensation! Oh—”

there—witnessed by his butler and housekeeper—make another copy for the Viscount, and promise that the original would be placed in the solicitor’s private safety-box in Chancery Lane not later than nine o’clock next morning. The wording of the bequest to his principal legatee brought objection from M'Tavish on the ground that “ye canna l’ave monny to a daid perrson!” But when Fordyce pointed out the actual force of that wording, after death, Angus grinned in agreement. . . .

When the Viscount drove back home to Devon, he was in a thoughtful mood. If the attempts upon Kate’s life had been actuated by some enemy of Jason Wilberson, M. P.,—with the object of substituting another secretary who might thereby obtain access to vital political secrets,—they couldn’t in any way concern her two remaining relatives. But it didn’t seem to him that Wilberson was yet of sufficient weight in the Government to make anyone go that far. If, on the other hand, it really were to prove

reached home—found Frank at his club—and had him come down to Devon the next afternoon.

The attempts upon Kate’s life proved as much of a mystery to Frank as to any of them. He had made a will before going off on his last big-game hunt—disposing of his property and his business interests down to the last pound—and he could see no loophole whereby an outsider might benefit. Kate was down in his will for a hundred thousand pounds; but it seemed obvious to him that if any stranger had known of that bequest it would have been his own life that was in danger—not Kate’s. He promised the Viscount, however, that he would make a point of being on his guard and would report anything which might occur.

TWO weeks later, Lord Vivian—who usually had friends staying in the house with him—chanced one evening to be alone except for the servants. His guests had left that afternoon, though others would be with him by the end of

the week. Meanwhile, there were three days to be occupied with his dogs, his books, his radio and his horses. As he never was at a loss for occupation, this was rather welcome than otherwise—yet he found with surprise that as the evening wore on he was conscious of some vague uneasiness. . . . He took a whisky with his last pipe, and went to bed.

At one o'clock he suddenly woke with the sensation of having been dreaming and rolling over upon a needle or pin in the mattress—it was probably a minute or two after the pricking sensation before he was sufficiently awake to sit up in bed and look about the room. The flashlight which he took from the little reading-table revealed nobody else in the room—no appearance of disturbance about his clothes or his desk by the window, which was slightly open for ventilation as he had left it. Stepping over to the door, he found it unlocked—but couldn't remember whether he had fastened it before retiring.

HE was about to go to sleep again when it struck him that he was feeling a bit queer. Then, in one terrific shock, he recalled the symptoms Kate had described when he saw her at Dr. Adams' house in Chelsea. He remembered that he had jotted down the Doctor's telephone-number in his memorandum-book—so he ran over to where his coat hung, and fished it out. Sloane 12-642—aye,—that was the number! He reached for the extension phone by his bed. The operator in the village cottage used as a post office would be in bed, of course, but he had made a point of having an extension installed on a table by her pillow and orders issued that she must answer night-calls. Before he succeeded in rousing her, it seemed to him that he was feeling noticeably more faint. He poured himself a stiff peg of whisky. Telling the woman it was a question of life or death, he stirred her up sufficiently to put through the trunk-call and get the local physician while she waited for it.

"Are you there, Doctor Adams? For-dyce speaking—from Devon. Fancy I've been let in for the same sort of attack as Kate—symptoms identical! How soon could you get down here—by plane—from Croydon? What should one do meanwhile? I've sent for my local man."

"By Jove, Viscount! I'm sorry to hear this! I'll wangle a plane through my friends at Scotland Yard and come at once—think I can make it in less than

two hours. Meanwhile drink whisky—all you can take. Have your local man make an incision an inch or more under puncture and pour in ammonia. Lie down—keep as quiet as possible. Where did you feel that pricking?"

"Left upper arm."

"Twist a trousers-belt around it at the shoulder and buckle it tight—until circulation stops. Wish you'd thought about doing that at the start. I'll be with you as soon as I can make it!"

The Viscount already had rung for his butler three times. When Wiggson came, he was ordered to twist the belt tighter about the upper arm—fetch another bottle of whisky—then wait in the lower hall to admit the local physician the moment he arrived, and Doctor Adams, later. Lord Vivian felt himself drifting into coma—not in the least unpleasantly, but talking was an effort. He looked at Wiggson with a grim smile. This whole thing must be a bad dream from which he'd wake presently! . . . He simply couldn't be dying! With an effort, he compelled himself to write down the instructions for the local doctor when he arrived, noting that they'd been given by a famous specialist even then on his way down—and when the young medico arrived, His Lordship was unconscious.

Doctor Barnes was a junior practitioner with no experience whatever in such cases. He didn't like to cut as deep as the memorandum said, or use ammonia to that extent—really thought, from the shakiness of the writing, that the Viscount had been delirious when he penciled the instructions.

LORD VIVIAN was dead within two hours after Adams reached the house with Chief Inspector Beresford. There was nothing to be gained in reproaching Barnes—but Adams took some pains to show him that he had destroyed His Lordship's last chance by neglecting to carry out the orders verbatim. However, he told Beresford that nothing but prompt application of a tourniquet at the shoulder when His Lordship got out of bed could really have saved him.

The Chief Inspector's face had taken on an expression of apprehension:

"I say, old chap! . . . They'll be havin' another go at the girl, now! . . . Possibly before night!"

"I thought of that, so before I left I had Colton around at my house, in the next room to her. I told him to get in touch with Sir Edward Pelham at once

and have a detail of Yard men watching the house! I'm even more worried about Francis Fordyce—for either he or Kate would be the nearest heir of the other, now the Viscount is gone, because nephews or nieces in the main line take precedence over any on the distaff side if there is no will. When not down on his Derbyshire estate, he lives at his club in London—when he's in the United Kingdom at all. Do you know, Beresford, I think I'll put through a trunk-call for him right now—he'll be coming down here for the funeral, anyhow, and will need protection when he does come."

THE two sat in the Viscount's study smoking, until the London call was "through." A very nervous club steward answered for Fordyce.

"Er—who is it calling Mr. Fordyce?"

"Dr. Samuel Adams, of Chelsea—and Chief Inspector Beresford of the C.I.D. We've a very serious communication for Mr. Fordyce. Will you connect the phone with his room, please?"

"It would be quite useless, Doctor. His man has just come down to my office with the report that Mr. Fordyce died fifteen minutes ago. He returned to the club at eleven-thirty and sat down in the smoking-room for a final peg. He complained to one of the members that he wasn't feeling quite fit, and was advised to call in the club medico, but he said it was not serious enough to warrant that, and went up to his room. His man says that he was very drowsy, and fell asleep as soon as he got into bed. An hour afterward, the man became alarmed and called in the physician, who found his heart still beating, very faintly, and was with him when it stopped altogether."

"By Jove! . . . That's sad news! I regret very much that I couldn't have talked with him this afternoon. Thank you, sir. I presume his man will notify the people in Derbyshire and look after the necessary arrangements—but the body must not be moved nor anything in the room disturbed until the Deputy Commissioner has been there with a medical man from Scotland Yard."

Beresford's brain was never more active than when his big frame was slouched in a comfortable chair with a thin spiral of smoke rising lazily from the bowl of his pipe, and his eyes apparently closed.

"My word!" he mused aloud. "Two fiendishly mysterious murders, and two equally brutal attempted murders, inside

of two weeks—an' not one shred of direct evidence! Somebody jabbed a hypo into the Viscount, here, while he was asleep. Frank Fordyce prob'ly was jabbed while on the crowded streets—at night. Kate Fordyce, in the crowded lounge of a popular restaurant. How can you prove the action on anybody in such circ'mst'nces?"

"Colton says he can identify the brute who tried to stab Kate—if ever he sees him again."

"Aye—provided the fellow looks an' is dressed as he was then—which you may be quite sure he'll not be!"

"Well, what line of investigation occurs to you?"

"H-m-m—if we could but find the object in these murders, we'd have something to go upon. From what you've told me, I know the exact relationship of these three Fordyces. Suppose we consider one inheritance after another an' see where it gets to? Here's the Viscount, for a starter. Estate of eighteen hundred acres, partly wooded. Costs at least three thousand a year to run it. Income from it's certainly no more than that. Frank an' Kate were the direct legal heirs of the Viscount—inheriting all he had, except for minor bequests.

"According to the way this thing started, Kate was to have been the first put out of the way—her uncle next. We'll suppose it really happened that way. That leaves Francis inheriting from both as direct legal heir. Very good! He then would have everything they had—an' his own property besides. Now Francis, having added his uncle's an' Kate's properties to his own, is himself murdered. And his nearest direct heirs are his mother's nieces, who live with him on the Derbyshire estate. They've always understood that they'd inherit the bulk of their cousin's property anyhow, an' had a decent enough living-allowance from him besides. On the other hand, he might marry at any time, or might outlive them—which would mean the difference between incomes of five hundred a year and possibly sixty or seventy thousand, each. Aye. Two unscrupulous women with a bit of nerve *might* kill a man for that—before he had the chance to marry."

DOCTOR ADAMS nodded agreement. "They might—but you don't believe they did, Beresford, any more than I do! And that theory doesn't in the least account for the other two intended mur-



It struck him that he was feeling a bit queer, and in one terrific shock he recalled the symptoms Kate had described.

ders—each before Frank's. Suppose we go on a bit further. Whatever the two cousins were due to get from Francis was already down in his will—anything he might inherit from his uncle and Kate was entirely outside of that and wasn't disposed of in his will. Couldn't be—as he knew nothing of what might come to him that way. All right! In those circumstances, who gets it?"

"Oh, I fancy that'll be perfectly clear. His next-of-kin with any legal claim—who, in this case, would be that chap Kate mentioned to you—a second cousin, was he not?"

"He'd be recognized as the next legal heir, would he, by the Courts?"

"Why not? Of course, with Miss Kate still alive, she will inherit, unquestionably—but we're assumin' the scoundrels have been successful in their scheme to eliminate her."

"Just how far does this 'next-of-kin' business go? There's a point along the line where the Crown steps in and takes over the property, isn't there?"

"Usually, in the case of a title. The Fordyce Viscounty doesn't descend on the distaff side in a woman's own right. Francis would have inherited the title. But now, it will be in abeyance as long as Miss Kate lives, going to her eldest son if she has one. If she dies unmarried, it will go to this second cousin, like these two property inheritances. If he dies intestate, I believe you said there was no kin nearer than fourth cousins—

blessed if I know whether the Crown would take over or not."

"Well, you're getting down to just what I was after! In this direct heir—this second cousin—we have some one who couldn't possibly have any expectations from the three, except by a pure fluke—or by just such elimination of the intervening lives. There's no way by which he could inherit a brass farthing from either of the three, unless some ailment carried 'em all off within a few weeks. The point is that, regardless of which died or inherited first, there would be three batches of inheritance which wouldn't be mentioned in either of those three wills, because they couldn't be foreseen—and each of them eventually would come his way as 'next-of-kin.' Now—if we suppose that Lord Vivian or his nephew was going to have from some source or other a fortune of which they knew nothing at present—possibly some loan made years ago by his father, and written off as a bad debt—and this second cousin obtained knowledge of it by some underhand means—eh? There's an object big enough for a sufficiently nervy scoundrel—equipped for mysterious killing as this brute unquestionably is—to plan out the elimination of the three obstacles in his way, and then sit tight until the fortune drops into his lap. Even if you have everything except the actual proofs of his guilt, he inherits that fortune just the same!"

"Dev'lish clever theorizing, Sam," Beresford agreed amiably. "An' I'd not say you're entirely balmy either—but it gets the C.I.D. nowhere. What I'm trying to figure out is a loose end to start with—an' there isn't any, d'ye see!"

"At the moment—no. I'm not insisting upon that second cousin, either—seems to me it easily might be some other brute in close touch with him—using him to get information, or having some hold upon him. But I've a hunch that the secret of the whole affair is in some way connected with Lord Vivian, and property of his."

Doctor Barnes came down from the Viscount's room and joined them, after impressing upon Wiggson that his master's body was not to be touched, nor anything disturbed about the room.

Adams said abruptly:

"Doctor, we need information, as soon as we can get it. If the Viscount's niece or nephew were here, either one would be in charge—but I regret to say Francis Fordyce has just died in London and we're not sure how soon it may be safe for Miss Kate to come down. That leaves only the butler Wiggson in charge. Had Lord Vivian any particular pal in the neighborhood—some one with whom he really was chummy?"

"Aye—Sir Bruce Farquahr—they grew up here together. Sir Bruce lives on the adjoining estate to the west—he's Chief Constable for North Devon."

"Sounds like precisely the sort of man needed here. Is he touchy about his police authority?"

"Only in cases of meddlesome interference. Considered a very level-headed chap—popular among the County families and the people."

"Would you kindly get through to him on the phone, Doctor? He'll recognize your voice. Ask him to come here at once—say that Lord Vivian has just died under suspicious circumstances—"

"H-M-M—are you sure it's advisable to put it that way, Doctor?" asked Barnes. "I'm not questioning your wider experience in the least, but you don't want to give this the publicity of a police affair, do you—have an autopsy, and all that? Wouldn't nine practitioners out of ten give the cause of death as 'heart-failure'?"

"They certainly would—and they'd be entirely right! We'll let the Coroner make just that statement in order to keep police activity in the background.

But there's going to be an autopsy—and you're going to learn something from it! What *caused* the heart-failure? Here's a man whose heart was perfectly sound two weeks ago—fighting for his life for hours! Ever know a case of simple heart-failure to last that long? This is straight murder, Barnes! . . . Get that through your head right now—but don't say anything about it until we've caught the brute who did it!"

Sir Bruce joined them in half an hour, greeting the Chief Inspector very pleasantly. Adams briefly sketched the whole story as they knew it; then Farquahr took charge of the house and started things moving by calling for the Coroner and a detail of four constables.

As soon as he had finished with the preliminaries, Adams asked him to sit down in the study and give them certain information which the Doctor had an idea might be helpful.

BERESFORD couldn't see the drift beyond what he knew to be Adams' conviction that the key to the whole affair must be in some way connected with the Viscount or his property.

"About where do the boundaries run on this Chelmsurst estate, Sir Bruce? I suppose it must be two or three miles long, at least."

"Runs along the cliffs facing Bristol Channel for a bit over two miles—then a jog inland for a mile-and-a-half, an' a narrower strip ending at my line on the west."

"What's the outcrop along the cliffs?"

"Oh, the usual trap-rock with an occasional bit of black basalt."

"With Cardiff about opposite! H-m-m! Had His Lordship ever drilled for water or minerals of any sort on his land?"

"My word, no! . . . Why should he? Now—that's a bit odd—your askin' that question, Doctor! The owner of the small estate on the east has been in the States for two or three years and his place has been let for the last year to some scientist-johnny who's been experimentin' in a shack in the woods near the edge of the cliff. An' that chap has been drillin' a bit very close to Vivian's line, with a contraption I never saw before—just a four-foot length of steel pipe five inches in diameter with a cutting-edge at one end. The supporting cable is given a circular, twisting motion—an' the pipe simply eats its way down into the rock, earth or anything else—taking out a smooth core of whatever it goes through.

Chap would drill for a day—then apparently give it up. Drill some other day—seemed to be when he felt in the mood. Not over seven or eight days altogether, I'd say. Primitive sort of arrangem'nt—just a small beam-tripod on wheels with a sheave at the top for the wire cable an' a small motor to run it—whole outfit removable in an hour."

"Did His Lordship know this scientist?"

"Met him once—when Martin Seamore came down to spend a night with the chap an' watch his experimentin'. Martin was by way of bein' a second cousin of Vivian's, d'ye see. Vivian had Martin an' this German biologist over to dinner that night—found the biologist rather int'restin' but a cold-blooded sort where scientific experimentation was concerned."

"What was the biologist's name? Heinemann? . . . Van Boekel? . . . Schufeldt?"

"No—those men are all pretty well up, I'd say—one hears the names frequently. This chap isn't as well known—may be workin' in a diff'rent line altogether. Wait a bit—I have it—Johann Katz. But where he's from, or what he's Herr Doktor of—I've not the slightest idea."

"About where was he doing that drilling?"

"All I know about that is what one of Vivian's gamekeepers told me, while Viv was off on an Oriental cruise with the Earl of Strawnmuir. As I recall it, the gamekeeper said it was close to Vivian's line, about two hundred feet back of the cliff-brow—but I fancy he's a bit hazy as to where the line does run."

"Fordyce would have a surveyor's map of his land somewhere in the house, wouldn't he?"

"Oh, aye. Bottom drawer of his desk, yonder—I've seen it dozens of times."

They examined the map and made certain measurements.

"Could you come out along that eastern line of the land after breakfast, Sir Bruce, with Beresford and me?"

"Rather! I can see you've something in mind which you fancy may be connected with poor Vivian's murder—an' I'll do a lot to see the brute who killed him taking the 'nine o'clock walk'!"

THE underbrush was so thick in the wooded section along the top of the cliffs—or slightly back from them—that it was difficult to trace the line of a crumbled stone wall laid two centuries

before, but soon Doctor Adams found bits of it cropping up where the undergrowth was thinner. Eventually, he stubbed his foot upon something under the low bush-growth—and lifted one end of a trap-rock core, four inches in diameter and three feet long. They searched ten minutes before they found the hole from which it had been drilled. Near that hole were three other cores—two of them rock, and one a dusky black in color, of a softer substance which most decidedly was not trap-rock and which was brittle enough to break in two or three pieces when dropped.

Holding one of the pieces under Sir Bruce's nose, and then under Beresford's, Adams said:

"I'm of the impression that this is of a richer bituminous content than any you'll find across the Channel in Cardiff. These cores indicate strata, ten feet below the surface, which may go down one or two hundred feet. Scarcely a question of its extending under the entire estate. What would you consider the cash value of eighteen hundred acres of richest steaming coal, one, two or three hundred feet thick? Eh?"

"My word!" said Beresford. "An' this boring is on Fordyce's side of the line!"

AN autopsy was held that afternoon. The Coroner had been instructed by the Chief Constable to let the verdict go as "heart-failure"—whatever might have caused it—and permit arrangements to be made for a funeral three days later. The verdict of the two physicians was meanwhile filed at Scotland Yard. That night, another autopsy was performed—upon Francis Fordyce's body in London—with a similar verdict.

Beresford had no intention of giving the murderers any warning that "death from natural causes" had been in question. So far the C.I.D. hadn't one shred of evidence beyond a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles, in their case—picked up under a bush below Lord Vivian's window—and blurred finger-prints on the front door jamb in the lower hall at Chelmhurst. In the case of Francis Fordyce, the hypo-puncture was found under the thick hair at the back of his head, where the first two examinations had overlooked it entirely.

Doctor Adams spent half the night interviewing three particular friends of his among his fellow scientists—men who knew something of every biologist then working in London. In the morning, he

told Sir Edward Pelham, the Deputy Commissioner, that he wished a search-warrant for the house of a certain Doktor Johann Katz, of Leipzig, who was residing in London during a course of biological experimentation in which freedom from interruption was necessary—a requisite which Tait Street in Shadwell, seemed to insure.

"What do you expect to find there in the way of proof, Doctor?" asked Sir Edward.

"Evidence that he is combining and concentrating snake-venoms, for one thing—far beyond any experimental use sanctioned by the British Medical Association. More particularly, I'm after some connection between Katz and one of the Fordyce heirs. With or without the warrant, I'm going into that house tonight. Katz is supposed to have flown from Croydon to Paris this afternoon—but he didn't get out of any plane at Le Bourget."

The Deputy Commissioner and the Chief Inspector glanced at each other doubtfully. In case Adams failed to get what a British jury would consider proof, the Department would get a pretty severe shaking-up from the newspapers and the Home Secretary—and if Adams broke into that house without a warrant, it laid this good friend of theirs open to a direct charge of burglary, regardless of the fact that he had materially assisted them in solving more than one baffling murder-mystery. Neither could see how Adams might find convincing evidence in the house of a scientist who by reason of his professional work was permitted to handle drugs and poisons which it is a criminal offense for a layman even to have in his possession.

FINALLY, however, they issued the warrant, and Beresford with two C.I.D. men accompanied Doctor Adams as he forced an entrance from the rear yard of the house on Tait Street in the East End. Exploring it with the utmost caution, they discovered a butler and a cook asleep in the basement. Leaving one detective to watch them and another to signal if anybody was entering the front door, they searched the parlor—the study behind it—and a rear extension built out into the yard for a laboratory.

In boxes with plate-glass fronts, they found thirty-eight specimens of the most venomous reptiles known. In culture-jars, enough concentrated venom to kill a hundred thousand persons if used in

hypodermics. In a safe—which an old ex-convict opened for them in less than five minutes—a number of documents indicating blackmail in at least fifty cases. In a packet of promissory notes and agreements, they found a copy of Francis Fordyce's last will. In this, after most far-seeing instructions for the carrying on of his industries and bequests running to half a million pounds, this clause occurred: "All the rest and residue of my estate, including all dividends or properties which may accrue to it after my death, I give and bequeath to my cousins Theresa and Mona Conyngham, now residing with me in Derbyshire." There was also the following agreement:

July 20th, 1930.

We, the undersigned,—in consideration of the sum of one thousand pounds to be advanced to us each month during a year from this date by our friend Herr Doktor Johann Katz, of Leipzig,—do each and severally agree to divide with the said Doktor Johann Katz, equally, whatever sums of money may come to us by inheritance, business enterprise, or from any source whatever—it being understood that this is an advance against what we have been led to believe are our future expectations—and is given us to cover a pressing need during the coming year. In making this advance, Doktor Katz—in consideration of the fact that he may eventually get from us much more than the original sum laid out—for his part, agrees to waive all question of repayment in case no moneys come to us during our lifetime.

Signed:

Theresa Conyngham.
Mona Conyngham.

Fordyce Towers,
Derbyshire.

Beresford read this agreement and the will-copy a second time—then looked at the Doctor in speechless amazement. Finally he asked:

"An' you've been through everything in that safe, Doctor?"

"Every solitary scrap."

"An' the papers in the secret cubby-hole behind the wainscoting?"

"Every one of them."

"Well, but—is there nothing from the second-cousin boulder—this Martin Seamore? There'll be an agreem'nt from him—of course?"

"Not a scrap! Why should Katz risk bringing him into it when that clause in Frank Fordyce's will blocks him from getting a penny of anything from the three? He may not even know of the

coal at Chelmsworth—just a case of keeping bad company and being tarred by it, I'd say! —Psst! There's Barker's signal! I've been expecting Katz back here at any moment. Hide behind the door—and we'll grab him as he comes into the room. Don't let go of his hands or wrists for one second—he may wear a ring loaded with that poison, or have a hypo in his pocket!”

THEY had all they could do to handcuff Katz's wrists behind his back and remove, with a pair of pliers, an old Venetian ring which he wore. The brute seemed as strong as a gorilla. When he was finally helpless, they undressed him, put other clothes on him, and took to the Yard those he had worn, to be searched for anything deadly. Then—a dentist who occasionally did special work for the C.I.D. removed several fillings from Katz's teeth and put in new ones. Adams was taking no chances of having the fellow cheat the gallows.

When Adams and Beresford went into Sir Edward's office to sum up, the Deputy Commissioner still expressed the wish that they could have found more proof.

“We've enough, Sir Edward—don't worry!” Doctor Adams smiled wearily. “Take first what he had to gain by the murders. With that clause in Francis Fordyce's will, Katz was sitting pretty. The Conyngham girls were the next-of-kin, and direct heirs as well, and young Fordyce was to be the last to die—presumably inheriting from Lord Vivian and Kate. Katz would get half of everything the girls got—and it was plenty! So much for his incentive to commit murder.

“Now for direct evidence. He had in his laboratory sufficient concentrated snake-venom to kill actual thousands—no possible excuse for his having such an amount. He was blackmailing at least fifty persons. He left the prints of his thumb and two fingers on the front door jamb at Chelmsworth the night of Lord Vivian's death—and dropped his spectacles under the bedroom window while climbing into it from that thick ivy-stem. On his right hand when we got him was an old ring with enough poison in it to kill ten men—in his waistcoat pockets were two hypos loaded with snake-venom. In two of his teeth were loose fillings covering cyanide—he could have pried out those fillings with a tack or small nail, and cheated the gallows.

Colton positively identifies him as the man who tried to stab Kate Fordyce on Regent Street. And in the wind-up of the whole ghastly affair, the joke is on him!”

“My word! . . . I can't see that! If he's acquitted (it's quite possible, you know), he gets Chelmsworth an' at least half the coal—not?”

“He does not! Lord Vivian willed his collection of guns, and a few paintings, to Francis—everything else except the usual small bequests went to ‘my beloved niece, Kate Fordyce—dead or alive.’ This works out that, if she died before him, everything she had or inherited passed to her heirs designated by will. And in Kate's will, she leaves everything *she* has, except a few personal belongings, to her friend and companion Cicely Manning, provided she, the testator, dies unmarried. If married, she leaves the three hundred a year to Cicely—one-third of all she has to her husband—two-thirds, to her children, if any. If there are no children, her husband and Cicely divide equally. If Kate continues to live, she gets Chelmsworth—the land, the manor-house, the coal—and a hundred thousand from Francis, besides. Francis could have inherited nothing from her—nor Seamore either—not a penny! I've talked things over with Sir Bruce Farquahr—the only person besides ourselves, presumably, who knows about the coal—and he's agreed to keep his mouth shut about it for the present. Seamore probably knows nothing about it. Katz is where he can't say a word before the trial.”

“BUT what's the idea of keeping silent? I don't quite see, Doctor—”

“Well—Jim Colton has, I'd say, a hundred thousand dollars; he will make a lot more eventually—but compared to that coal, his capital is negligible. It looks to me as if Kate and Jim may quietly get married within a week or two—and she couldn't get a better man anywhere on earth. If he hears about the coal before that—well, he's an engineer and he could size up the approximate number of millions, sterling, in about two minutes! And then I'm afraid Jim would fade out of the picture—his pride wouldn't let him court a woman richer than himself. So I'm egging 'em on to elope—on the grounds that he can look after her much more safely that way! Understand?”

Another intriguing story by Mr. New will appear in the forthcoming December issue.

A Mystery of the Legion

By PERCIVAL
CHRISTOPHER WREN

Illustrated by
Charles Fox

*Who wrote "Beau Geste"
and "Valiant Dust."*



THE soldiers of the old French Foreign Legion—who perished to a man in the Great War—had a story of the Captain's Gravestone. It was a true story and ran as follows:

A big company was marching from Biskra to Figui.

One man, ignoring the admonitory motto, "*Marchez ou crevez*" ("*March or die*"), habitually lagged behind the column from the first day of the long, long march.

On the third or fourth day he not only fell behind and lagged in the rear of the column, but actually lay down as though too ill, or too exhausted, to go another step.

Captain Le Sage of the Battalion had for some reason ridden back to the site of the camp of the previous night, and while returning to the column, now well ahead, he found the man, who apparently preferred dying to marching.

Captain Le Sage, a splendid officer who contrived to combine an iron discipline with genuine kindness, came upon the recumbent *Légionnaire*.

"Hey, you!" he said, as he reined up, "None of that, now. *Marchez ou crevez!* What's the matter?"

"I can't go another step, *mon Commandant*," groaned the man, raising his head from his arms on which it was pillowed.

"Ill?" asked Captain Le Sage.

"Dying, *mon Commandant*, I think," was the feeble reply, as the man's head fell heavily forward again.

Dismounting from his horse, and looping the reins over his left arm, Captain Le Sage bent over the man, turned him on to his back, and sat him up.

"Come," said he, "you don't look too bad. Take a pull at this."

And producing his flask, he handed it to the soldier.



As Le Sage turned to mount his horse, the soldier raised his rifle, pointed it at the back of the head of the unsuspecting officer, and fired.

The man drank, while the Captain eyed him thoughtfully.

Where had he seen him before—he who had seen so many *Légionnaires*? Never, perhaps. Yet there was something about the eyes—

"Have another drink," he said, "and then pull yourself together. You must get up and march in front of me. You don't want to be filleted by the Arabs, do you, or have your eyes picked out by the vultures while you're still alive, or die of thirst? It's a nasty death. . . Come on, up with you."

And Captain Le Sage turned to mount his horse. As he did so, he pulled the reins over the horse's head, arranged them in his left hand, and put his left foot in the stirrup.

The soldier raised his rifle, pointed it at the back of the head of the unsuspecting officer, and fired, at a range of a few feet.

It is an amazing fact that the bullet missed its mark, doing no more damage than tearing the flap that hangs from the *képi* to protect the neck from the rays of the sun.

Wheeling about, Captain Le Sage drew his revolver from the holster at his belt and shot the man dead ere he could fire again.

These are the actual and officially admitted facts of the case. . . .

The sequel is interesting and remarkable; and the account of it is equally true.

The next marching battalion, patrol, or *péloton méhariste* that passed that

way and reached that place, was more than interested to discover that the spot was marked by what appeared to be a milestone, but proved, in effect, a gravestone or tombstone—for on it were neatly carved the words:

ON THIS SPOT
ON THE 1st OF DECEMBER, 19—
le *Légionnaire* BARREN WAS
MURDERED
BY CAPTAIN LE SAGE.

The existence of this extraordinary memorial-stone falsely commemorating, as a foul deed, an act at once of self-defense and righteous judgment, was duly reported. By order of the officer commanding the zone, the inscription was obliterated and the stone removed.

Before long, another military force, traversing that route and reaching that spot, found it marked by a similar stone, bearing a similar inscription.

The fact was again reported, and again a working-party was dispatched from Biskra to destroy the lying record that reversed the rôles of would-be murderer and intended victim.

And yet again, a party patrolling the Biskra-Figuig road discovered, on the identical spot, a memorial stone to *le légionnaire* Barren, "foully murdered by Captain Le Sage."

For the third time the inscription was obliterated, the stone and all traces of it removed from the site on which it had stood bearing false witness—against a gallant officer, and of the cause of death of a treacherous scoundrel.

In undue course, the stone reappeared for a fourth time. . . . For a fifth time. . . . For a sixth time. . . . For a seventh time. Each time it was removed.

In the end, the authorities won, as the authorities must always do, against the individual.

But, in one respect, the individual defeated the authorities, for the amazing mystery was never cleared up, the problem never solved. To this day, nobody knows who prepared those stones and placed them in position; why so much trouble, expense and risk were incurred; nor how it was done with such amazing secrecy and success.

At least, nobody knew officially, and even old Tant de Soif, *doyen* and "Father" of the battalion, had not so much as a theory. He only knew, like the rest of the XIXth Army Corps, that the thing did happen, and that the facts as stated above were indisputable. And what Tant de Soif didn't know about the Legion was not worth knowing. For, as I've said before, he was the recognized arbiter of disputes and questions concerning all matters relating to the battalion and the regiment.

McSNORRT and I were back in camp once more, a little surprised and a little pleased, perhaps, to find ourselves still alive; in the canteen, we were celebrating our safe return and compensating ourselves for days of drought and depression.

Having but recently heard my old friend Tant de Soif speculating on the puzzle of the Lying Memorial-stone—a problem as interesting to the soldiers of the desert as is that of the *Marie Celeste* to the sailors of the sea—it occurred to me that possibly McSnorrt, nearly as old a *Légionnaire* as old Tant de Soif himself, might have at least a theory of his own.

It developed that he had more than a theory—he had a solution. He had the whole story, indeed.

Now, but for the fact that McSnorrt had, alas, served a period in a penal battalion and had been a long-remembered inmate of the unspeakable Biribi military prison, I should have been inclined to think that his ingenious mind had concocted an explanation to fit the case. But in view of his peculiar advantages and undeniable special knowledge, I am strongly inclined to believe that what he told me is the truth. It well may be—in any case, it was an interesting story.

"BARREN'S gravestone?" McSnorrt repeated. "Aye, of course I know it, ye fule. What d'ye think?"

"Yes, of course, of course," I assured him. "What I meant was, do you know how the stone reappeared, time after time—who put it there, and why? I'm asking you, McSnorrt, because even old Tant de Soif doesn't know."

"Of course he doesna, the dommed old drunkard. The puir heathen, he knows nothing—and he knows that, wrong!"

"But I was sure you would," I said. "Probably the only man in the Legion who—"

"I'll have another bottle," interrupted McSnorrt. "Barren! Aye, 'twas Barren all right, but which Barren?"

"There were two of them, then, were there?"

"Aye, twins. And never did ye take two peas from one pod more like each to the other than those two Barrens. 'Twas uncanny. . . . Aye, and ggrand lads they were."

"English?"

"I dinna ken. I should say not. They were such dommed leears—I've heard them claim to be English, Scottish, Irish, American, French, German, Swiss, Russian, aye, and Spanish, when it suited them! If ye asked what I thought, I should have said Alsations or Lorraines."

"Anyway, they'd gone to the Legion in a hurry, and it must have been some fine prànk that brought them there. . . I did hear that a fat police-official met with an accident one night. They arrested one Barren and he proved that it was his brother. Then they arrested the brother, and he proved it was the first one. Then they arrested them both, and each proved an alibi. They were good at proving alibis, for when Tweedledum had a game on, Tweedledee would go and impersonate him ten miles away."

"And while the authorities were settling which was the real Simon Pure, they both escaped. So, having made things a bit hot for themselves in the old home town, and indeed in the old country, they legged it for the Legion—and soon began the same games there."

"Always 'twas the other brother that had done it, and they played into each other's hand beautifully."

"Anyhow, they got sent to a big *poste* away down south, where Captain Le Sage was in command, and there they soon began their merry old tricks."

"The first time Tweedledum was up before the Captain—"

"'Twasn't me, sir,' said he. 'Twas Tweedledee.'

"'Is that so, now,' said Le Sage. 'He did it, and you get the blame, eh?'

"*Oui, oui, mon Commandant,*' smiled Tweedledum. '*Hélas!*' 'Tis like that so often.'

"Well, it won't be like that any more,' answered Le Sage, with the little click of his jaw that his men knew. And forthwith he sent for Tweedledee.

"And there they stood before him, as like as two cartridges, two bayonets, two peas from the same pod. Aye, like Siamese twins that the good Lord God had forgotten to join together.

"And to make assurance doubly sure, the devils both parted their hair in the middle, both grew a square-cut beard, each exactly the same size and shape as the other, and curled up their mustaches precisely alike.

"Captain Le Sage stared at 'em. 'Twins, of course,' said he.

"*Mais oui, Monsieur le Commandant,*' they replied as one man.

"Ah, and two minds with but a single thought. . . . Twin souls. Well, in your lives you're moderately beautiful, and in the cells you shall not be divided. . . . One and indivisible. Seven days' cells for the pair of you.'

"But, *Monsieur le Commandant*, I am innocent!' both exclaimed simultaneously, a look of respectful protest and injured innocence gleaming from the four identical eyes.

"I'm sure you are,' purred Le Sage. 'So am I. Innocent and simple. Fourteen days, instead!' And he waved them and the escort away.

"That was how Le Sage dealt with the Barren twins.

AND they didna like it. They were lovers o' justice and, as they often pointed out to their admiring and sympathizing comrades, 'twasn't just. They hadna *both* done it, whatever it was; and obviously Le Sage was punishing an innocent man every time they were both punished for the fault o' one.

"Well, they couldna give up committing crimes, for it was not their nature to; and Captain Le Sage wasna going to give up his habit of getting the right man for such a trifle as getting the wrong one at the same time—not he!

"Things went from bad to worse for the Barren twins. If one got drunk and resisted the guard, both were judged drunk and resisting the guard; though

one might have been asleep in his bed at the time, or on sentry-go, or one of the 'resisted' guard itself.

"If one was doubling round in the *péloton des hommes punis* with a sack of sand on his back, the other was doubling round also.

"So long as the Barrens played their game of, 'It was not me, sir, it was my brother,' just so long did Captain Le Sage play his game of, 'Wrong again, my lad—it was both of you.'

"And as it had been the lifelong custom of the brothers Barren to play that game, they were too old to give it up.

NOW Le Sage, as you know, was a Commandant who considered discipline the better part of soldiering—and discipline he would have.

"So when it came at last, to a real question of whether the Barrens should break his discipline or he should break the Barrens, there wasna any doubt about the answer. And Le Sage broke them so completely that they deserted.

"Now they were clever laddies, yon Barrens, and brave, strong, determined men, and although they 'made the promenade' from one o' the very worrst places ye could choose, they got away with it.

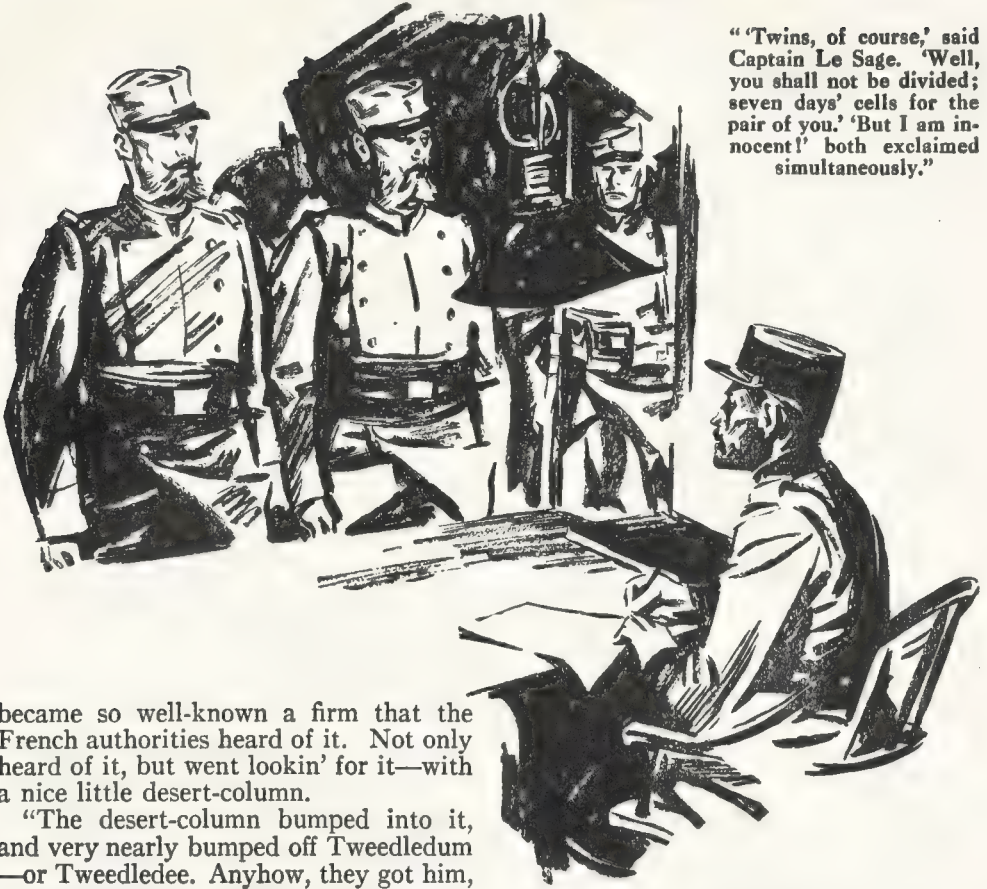
"One day, weeks later, while they were lyin' in the shade of a rock, all but dead of thirst, a scout from a nomad tribe o' Bedouins spied them and rode off to tell his Sheik the glad news.

"When the fighting-men arrived, they saw a double man, or two amazing strange devils exactly alike, indistinguishable one from the other, sitting side by side—their inner arms, so to speak, linked, and their outer arms raised straight up to the sky.

"There they sat, chanting a *sura* o' the Koran, and calling upon the Ninety-and-nine Sacred Names of Allah the Merciful, the Compassionate.

"Well, once more the Barren twins had brought it off. The tribe adopted them, and before very long the Sheik, having suddenly and mysteriously died from a pain in his belly,—in spite o' the fact that the strange white men or gods had doctored him themselves,—they became the one and indivisible Double-Sheik o' the tribe, and soon made it what it had pretty well been before—a raiding robber gang.

"Now, with the brains, knowledge and experience of such a pair as the Barren brothers behind it, the tribe's raiding business soon paid a fine deevidend, and



"'Twins, of course,' said Captain Le Sage. 'Well, you shall not be divided; seven days' cells for the pair of you.' 'But I am innocent!' both exclaimed simultaneously."

became so well-known a firm that the French authorities heard of it. Not only heard of it, but went lookin' for it—with a nice little desert-column.

"The desert-column bumped into it, and very nearly bumped off Tweedledum—or Tweedledee. Anyhow, they got him, recognized him as Tweedledum—or Tweedledee—and sentenced him to quite a term with the Zephyrs. They didn't shoot him, because all they could prove against him at the court-martial was that he was a deserter from the Legion. He hadna, according to his own story, raided French *postes*, or done anything more than remain with the Arabs as a prisoner because he couldna get away.

"As the Prisoner's Friend pointed out in defending him, he hadna been captured under arms, making war on the French. On the contrary, the French were making war on the tribe that had captured him, and it wasna his fault that he'd been there when they did it.

"Anyhow, there it was.

"He was sentenced for deserting, for stealing a rifle and bayonet, for losing and damaging Government property—(worth five francs in the open market) and sent to the penal battalion to do his stretch and then be returned to the Legion to finish his term of service.

"That was Tweedledum—or Tweedledee—Barren.

"Meanwhile the other Barren remained as what ye might call a 'Robber Barren' and Sheik of the Beni Tarzhish tribe,

to carry on, single-handed, as best he could—single-handed now, for the first time in his life.

"Did he try to do anything for his brother?

"Did he not? He soon had his spies at work, and spared neither time, men, nor money, to keep track of where his brother was. 'Twas his idea, of course, to wait till the puir laddie was out on road-gang work, somewhere where he could swoop down with the whole of his fighting-men, wipe out the guard, and free his brother and the whole lot of 'em. Those that liked could join him, and those that didna want to join could gang their ways, wi' all the help he could give them.

"But he never got the chance.

"Perhaps Le Sage had said a word to the effect that Barren was a bird that needed a good cage; or perhaps the penal battalion officers found it out for themselves.

"Anyhow, the bonny boy did his full time; and, at long last, was sent back to the Legion. I doubt if he came back lookin' exactly like his brother, though. A few years in Biribi, a chain-gang,

penal slavery on the roads, and so forth, leave their mark on a man.

"And when Le Sage, as Fate would have it, was sent to Biskra to take over, just before the march to Figuig, he didna recognize Tweedledum—or Tweedledee.

"But the man recognized the officer—the first man who'd ever got the better o' him and his brother, the man who'd broken them and driven them to desert; the man who was the cause o' his having endured those insufferable years of terrible punishment, the man who had been the cause of the death of his brother—for he believed, from what he'd heard in prison, that his twin had been killed in the battle in which he himself had been taken prisoner. . . .

"Now, ye know all the facts o' how Captain Le Sage killed him on the march, don't ye?"

"Aye," I replied.

"Well, ye don't, then. . . . I'll tell ye something.

"After Le Sage had drawn his revolver and shot Barren, he dismounted, took the man's rifle, and stared thoughtfully at his dead face for a minute.

"As he turned away and looked up, about to remount his horrse, he suddenly saw the head o' a man peering at him over the top o' a sand-dune. An Arab! And he realized that this Buddoo was not only peering at him, but peering along the sights o' a rifle.

"Le Sage ducked, even as the *bang!* came; and the bullet missed his head. Twice in a few minutes, and at a range of a few yards, a rifle had been fired at him, and he had escaped unhurt—as was the way and the luck o' yon Le Sage.

"The rifle he had in his hand was of course unloaded.

"Again drawing his revolver, he waited . . . and waited. . . .

"After a while, he jumped into the saddle, and like the man he is, rode straight at the spot where his enemy must be crouching behind the ridge of the sand-dune, with a loaded gun in his hands.

"Well, he just wasna' there. He had jumped on to his racing-camel and made off between the dunes, or along a *wadi*.

"Only then it was that Le Sage returned to the road and galloped after the company.

"Now d'ye begin to see daylight, ma mannie? The Arab who had fired at Le Sage was one of the other Barren's band, hanging on the flanks of the marching company, awaiting a chance to rescue Tweedledum—or Tweedledee.

"Of course the Sheik twin had got into touch with the Légionnaire twin at Biskra, and had told him what to do. He was to fall out, and lie down to die at a certain spot, so many kilometers from Biskra; and there, as soon as the company was out of sight and sound, he'd be 'found' by his brother. But the kindness of Le Sage had spoiled that little game."

"I SEE!" I murmured. "That's how it was, was it? But what about the lettering of the memorial, obviously done by a regular professional stonemason?"

"Huh!" laughed McSnorrt. "Canna ya guess what the trade o' the twins had been in the old days, away back in Alsace or Lorraine, or wherever it was?"

"I see," I said again. "Monumental stone-masons!"

"Aye—and monumental rogues!" replied McSnorrt censoriously, as he turned down an empty glass.



"They were clever laddies, yon Barrens—and although they deserted from one o' the worst places ye could choose, they got away."

The Sportsman's Scrapbook

VIII—Dueling

By EWING WALKER

IS dueling a sport? Hardly; but the man who fought one certainly took a sporting chance, sporting incidents occasioned many a one and sportsmen often were principals.

Frequently duels arose over trivialities, were fought without rancor, and in no wise affected the friendship existing between the combatants. Colonel Mellish, an Englishman, once had an altercation with his friend Martin Hawke, the best shot of his time. A duel resulted.

"Take care of yourself, Hawke, for by God! I shall hit you," said Mellish.

"I will, my lad," rejoined Hawke; "and let me recommend you to take care of your own canister."

Mellish missed; Hawke fired and struck his opponent.

"You've winged me, Hawke," calmly announced the Colonel. "Lend me your neckcloth to tie up the broken pinion."

And they returned home in the same conveyance, as good friends as ever.

A nobleman of Naples fought fourteen duels to prove Dante was a greater poet than Ariosto. On his death-bed, he admitted to his confessor he had read the works of neither!

A French knight once shouted that his mistress was lovelier than any Englishwoman. An Englishman challenged and killed him.

Two French nobles couldn't agree whether an embroidered letter was an *x* or a *y*. They arranged a duel with six men on each side to decide the matter!

The dog of an English army officer and the dog of a captain in the English navy met, growled and fought. The gentlemen, to carry through, also fought, one of them being killed.

Between three and four hundred years ago, many duels were fought when one pistol was loaded and one empty, the parties drawing lots for the choice of weapons. The usual distance, in such affairs, was *one pace*—about three feet!

The ladies were not to be outdone by their brothers. In the Eighteenth Century, the Countess of Polignac and Lady de Nesle fought a duel with pistols for

the possession of the handsome Duc de Richelieu.

Moussin, an opera singer of France, mastered the sword, and killed three men.

In New Orleans today may be seen a grove of patriarchal trees known as the "dueling oaks." Under them, probably, were fought more duels than on any other spot in this country—duels with daggers, swords, pistols, and finally, on horseback with sabers, the adversaries stripped to the waist.

The fever of dueling touched all classes. About 1832, Ole Bull, the great violinist, killed a fellow artist. The composer Handel and his good friend Matheson, another composer, fell out over the latter's opera, "Cleopatra," and settled it with swords, the duel ending when Matheson broke his weapon on a button of Handel's clothing. The poet Moore, after fighting a duel with pistols, was chagrined by a charge that the weapons had been loaded with paper pellets.

The Civil War governor of Louisiana, Henry W. Allen, felt his friend, a clergyman, had suffered an affront at the hands of an editor. Allen issued a challenge. They fought at three paces—about nine feet—with pistols loaded with buckshot. Both were desperately wounded.

Thomas Biddle of Missouri was a member-elect of Congress; Spencer Pettis was a major in the U. S. army. They had a dispute. Biddle, the challenged party, being near-sighted, stipulated pistols and a distance of *five feet*! They met; their weapons, in position, actually *overlapped* each other. They fired. Both died of their wounds.

All such encounters were not so sanguinary. Sir Jonah Barrington and one McNully of Ireland fought a duel. McNully was struck in the side, and cried out, "I'm hit!" The attending surgeon ripped open his clothes, to discover the bullet had merely struck a buckle of his suspenders or "gallows," as they then were known.

"By ye gods, Mac," exclaimed one of the seconds, "ye're the only rogue ever I knew that was *saved* by the *gallows*!"

Smuggler's

The Story So Far:

IT had been a wild, wild day for Frederick Alonzo Binns, an amiable young man weighing some two hundred pounds—not all of which was bone and muscle. First, he'd got in very bad with his prospective father-in-law, Clarendon Webster. It's easy to get in bad with one's prospective father-in-law; but F. Alonzo had found a new way—thus: The latest hero aviator landed at the local field that day, and skimmed across the field to avoid decapitating the welcoming crowd. Binns had been alone in his car on the vacant side of the field, and had kindly picked up the aviator and driven him to his hotel—while Clarendon Webster, who was a local political power, had waited in vain to make the speech of welcome he'd prepared. There had been hard words over this episode; indeed lovely Mary Webster had more than hinted at giving back Frederick Alonzo's ring and at reconsidering the courtship of Binns' rival, Morley Buck.

Second: That very evening had come a letter from one Wally Pidge, to whom in bygone days of affluence Binns had loaned money, secured by a queer old house on the outskirts of the town of Seashore. Briefly, Wally couldn't or wouldn't pay the money, and F. Alonzo could have the house, an interesting old place, with secret stairways and passages, built long years before by an old Frenchman named Du Port.

Impulsively F. Alonzo piled his Chinese cook He Gow and his diabolic pet cat into the car and drove to Seashore to claim his house. He arrived about midnight—and was met by a burst of pistol fire!

Something queer about all this, decided F. Alonzo as he went hastily away from there. He decided to lie low, at least until the deed to the house arrived, and find out what sort of people were shooting at visitors from his house.

He put up in town therefore; and to account for his presence took a job as delivery-boy for the local grocer, Delfus Jones. In this guise he met the caretaker Harley Gann, but failed to get beyond the kitchen of his strange house. So that night he broke into the barn, found the

entrance to the secret passage as located on the map, and with the aid of a jimmy and an electric torch explored the amazing old place. He found plenty of boxes and barrels and dust and barked shins in the basement, and some fine old rooms above-stairs; he found a picnic party of young people in the cove at the end of the seaward secret passage; but nothing to explain the strange warlike conduct of Harley Gann.

Next night a diversion occurred; Seashore celebrated the New Deal and the reopening of the cannery and the sawmill, with a Venetian pageant on the lagoon. F. Alonzo attended, along with He Gow, his cat and his delivery-boy friend, young Chesterfield Wurzel; more, he took a prominent part, which included ramming the gondola of his rival Morley Buck. Indeed the whole fool show ended in a gaudy riot, and all the fireworks went off at once.

Next day the missing deed to the Du Port place turned up. And renouncing his rôle of delivery-boy, F. Alonzo took formal possession of his new property, and invited all and sundry to a housewarming party for the following evening—the party to be thrown after the Indian play which was to culminate Seashore's New Deal celebration, so that most of the guests would be in costume.

But there were many things that Binns didn't understand about the situation. Which was not strange, for the caretaker Harley Gann and his friend Cap Warington had been using the house as headquarters for certain illegal activities; even now, indeed certain Federal officers were setting out for the town of Seashore in response to a hot tip. (*The story continues in detail:*)

A HOST is the same the world over, be he of low or high degree. As the hour for the beginning of festivity nears, his solicitude deepens, whether he is a desert miner with six slices of bacon, or the gentleman of Newport with his special caviar. So it was with Frederick Binns, in blue coat and white trousers, when he took up a solicitous station on the driveway porch. A long

Gove

A large and lively climax here concludes this sprightly chronicle of blithe adventure.

By
**TALBERT
JOSSELYN**

Illustrated by
Harry Lees



From within the house came muffled descending sounds of gunfire, of howls and yowls. Somebody had fallen down the secret stairs!

scanning of the driveway had its final reward: The lights of an approaching car showed among the trees.

"Here they come," said the host. "Wonder who this first one will be."

Had he known his Seashore better, he would have had little need for wonder. Down from the car stepped a majestic personage in royal purple robes: Mrs. J. Mosby Chichester.

"Cheerio! Cheerio!" came her cry, and a hand flashed further greeting.

Nobody could outdo Frederick Binns in the cheerio business.

"Cheerio! Cheerio!" he cried back, and sped down steps.

"Ah," said Mrs. Chichester, "what a night!"

Hands were grasped.

"Is the show over?" asked the host.

"The Indian one. And how did it go?"

"Winnikahaha the Indian Maid?" No, it is not over, not quite. I believe

there is one act and the epilogue yet to go. Several minor delays, and the lights went out twice during climatic scenes."

"Oh," said the host, "then that explains it. They went out here, too. I thought somebody was playing the fool with the switches."

Mrs. Chichester's head snapped.

"Undoubtedly somebody at the powerhouse was! They always contrive to short-circuit things the nights of plays. No, although Winnikahaha was not ended, we decided to come on; we thought that if we might be able to assist you—But stay! The others."

The others were presented. Mr. Wilfred Ducey, garbed as of the Festival night, plumed headdress and all. Mr. Arbuthnot Walbridge, none other than he of the lavender suit and waxed mustache, who had once barred Marco Polo's progress boatward.

"Oh, hello!" grinned Host Binns.

"We meet again," smiled Mr. Walbridge in return. "What times we had that night!"

"Sure did," was the agreement. "Oh, yes, of course." The host broke off pleasant reminiscence to acknowledge Mr. Gaylord Munn and Mr. De Brett Stapleton, also dressed as gentlemen of old Venice. The combined splendor of the five made Mr. Binns long for smoked glasses. But then, he had once been a member of the Doge's retinue himself, and no colorless slouch, either.

"Welcome," said Mr. Binns. "Let's go right inside and have a cup of negus—a glass of punch. To my mind, there's nothing quite like a cordial welcoming cup."

There wasn't. F. Alonzo Binns had done some countryside scouring that afternoon. A full punch-bowl stood on a table in the front hall.

"Delicious," murmured Mrs. J. Mosby Chichester. "There's something about it—"

"There is indeed," agreed the host. "Just simple fruit-juices rightly blended. Another? Please go right ahead. I believe I see other cars coming." . . .

"Charmed," repeatedly greeted Frederick Binns. "So good of you to favor me. Please go right inside and—" He shook hands until he thought that something had broken. "And once I thought I wanted to be President," he muttered.

Came Seashore in Venetian guise, in everyday guise, and at length in Indian.

UP the steps boiled the Winnikahaha tribe, patting hands over mouths and whooping, to surge about a punch-bowl kept miraculously filled by alert Willie Kee and to grunt "Ugh! Heap good," as all true Indians should, and then to circle the reception-rooms with bodies doubled forward and heads bobbing, which is real Indian dancing, or nobody knows his Indian Hoyle.

Arrived immediately after the tribe, a small bald-headed man with two wicker hampers, to be heartily greeted by the host and escorted to a special costume-room, whence, after the hampers had been deposited, he was escorted toward refreshment.

"Something to put color into your cheeks," said Frederick Binns.

The Gilberstein little giant gave a sputtering cough and ladled again.

"Color! I never want to see no more color in cheeks again! My God, you ever put red make-up on a hundred peo-

ple? Don't do it, if you don't want to start biting things. And them costumes, all mixed up and my list still lost. Never again this town for me!"

A hand touched a Binns elbow. He turned to find himself confronted by one of Winnikahaha's people, by sex feminine, by skirt short, by complexion streaky red.

"Ah-ula-ula-ula-ooo!" cried she of Winnikahaha's own.

Here was Miss Lotus Givens.

SHE seized him by the arm and dragged him to a corner. "I have been looking here, I have been looking there," she said, reproducing how she had been looking by shading her eyes with a hand and peering afar in the best Indian lore tradition. Then she slyly pinched him. "You are clever. You have forged the documents to this property so realistically that they believe you to be the owner. But what have you found?"

The quickest way out of this was the truth.

"Found nothing. Very disappointed. Leaving tomorrow for a trip around the world."

Miss Givens expressed real surprise.

"Around the world? How are you, a grocery-boy, going to travel around the world?"

Truth would have to be helped out.

"Pantry-boy on a liner."

"Oh, yes, of course. But meanwhile, continue searching. And I, in order to throw them off the scent, shall dance."

She went floating down the room as no real Indian would have dared float.

"Gee," breathed Frederick Binns. "I wish I was that way. Wouldn't life be easy? Continue searching, hell!"

He edged toward the front door. Seeing the Givens person had made him think of another girl. He knew that she wouldn't come; yet he edged toward the door just to have a look anyway.

He didn't see her, but he saw somebody else. Caretaker Harley Gann stood by the punch-bowl. The man who had longed for companionship certainly now had it. His attempt to stay in his own room staring at nothing had been battered down by Venetians and Indians making joyous thump-thump. Louder the joyousness came through the walls, and willy-nilly he had been drawn toward it, as far as the punch-bowl.

"Hello," said Host Binns. "Well, well, some different from the house that we used to know, eh, Harley?"

It was so different that Harley had already put away three brimming cups.

"A glass of punch?" asked Mr. Binns. "Owner and caretaker. Now that's a nice thought."

"Doncarefido," said Mr. Gann.

They carried out the nice thought, and as the owner was putting down his glass he caught sight of some one standing in the doorway. Mary's father, old Clarendon Webster.

Well, *he* at least had come; and then it infiltrated as to why he had come. The magnet that had brought him was the man standing at the punch-bowl—Harley Gann, who had once almost combed the Binns hair with bullets.

"Howdy!" greeted F. Alonzo Binns. "Come on in and have a glass of punch. Yes, and meet Mr. Gann, my caretaker. Mr. Webster—Mr. Gann."

"Harreyuh?" said Mr. Gann.

"A glass of punch all around," said the host.

"A half glass for me," corrected the elder Webster, eyes fixed on the Du Port house caretaker.

Mr. Gann's eyes were fixed on nothing, but his hands made up for this, being fixed tight upon the table.

Clarendon Webster, the power behind the Sheriff, sniffed loudly. A triumphant look was already on his face.

"If you'll excuse us a moment, Mr. Gann? Frederick, I'd like a word with you." He nodded toward the front porch. In its seclusion he asked briskly; "Get it?"

"Get what?"

"Why he shot at you?"

"Oh, that." Host Binns shook his head. "Why, no, I hadn't given it any more thought. Guess he was nervous."

"Ha, I knew it!" cried Mr. Webster. "Get yourself disguised and snoop around for a week and find out nothing, and I haven't been here ten seconds before it's all clear to me."

"Yeah?"

"Of course! Man was drunk. Fine kind of caretaker you have! He was drunk, and shot at you. Drunk then—drunk now."

"You think so?"

"Know so! Look at him now."

Frederick Binns looked through the doorway at the punch-bowl guardian, and there was no denying that Mr. Webster had something to base his thesis on. Illumination came to the host.

"Say, I'll bet I started the poor cuss off this morning. He was helping bring



in the groceries and tripped and fell up the steps. When I saw that he'd banged himself I gave him a little snort."

"Of course he fell up the steps," snapped the other. "Sot. Drunk all the time. Probably been sitting out in front every night with a gun waiting to shoot people. I'd bounce him in two minutes if he was *my* caretaker! Well, that's that, and I'll be going."

But there was something so alluring about the commingled Venetians and Indians that irresistibly he was drawn toward the edge of the colorful whirlpool. "Just stay ten seconds," he explained to himself.

Host Frederick Binns heard his name called.

"Good night!" he muttered. "Now what?"

A youthful person was leaning over the balustrade in the upper hall and making signs. Peering through the balusters was an animal, a cat.

"Cripes!" said the host. "I'd forgotten all about them." He went swiftly up the broad stairs. "Now look here, Chesterfield, I've been meaning to tell you about using that gun."

"Hoh," came retort, "I aint had to use it yet. All I had to do so far is to haul the old gat out and shove it up against their ribs."

"Chesterfield!"

"I've sure had a swell time," reminisced the house detective. "At first I worked the downstairs rooms, but I seen pretty soon that there wasn't going to be no danger from pickpockets with everybody wearing the kind of pants that aint got no pockets, and some of 'em not wearing any pants at all. So

I come along upstairs where it's dark, and it's a good thing I come. A lot of smart-alecks and their girls have been snoopin' around trying to find snug corners, but after they've found 'em, they aint stayed long. What with my flashlight, and Ash Can's gleamin' eyes, and my gun—"

The house detective broke short off and raised a warning hand.

"Hark! There's somebody coming up the back stairs now. You stay right here and you'll see something. Come on, Ash Can."

Before Host Binns could interpose, detective and feline ally had merged into the upper hall blackness and soundlessly disappeared. A moment passed, and then, from the vicinity of the attic stairs, came command:

"Cut out that neckin'!"

Rose a masculine oath and a feminine squeal. There followed uncomplimentary words from the owner of the oath.

"Oh," sounded the Wurzel voice, "so you're a tough cookie, are you? Well, then, how do you like 'at?"

"'At" evidently wasn't liked. The primary oath and squeal were nothing to those that now rolled out.

"What the devil you trying to do? Say, you little fool, is that gun loaded? Get it out of my— *Yeouh!* What's that animal?"

"Loaded?" came answer. "Sure, it's loaded. Sure it's loaded! Want to see the ca'tridges? 'At animal's my tracking-cat. Bite? Sure, it'll bite. I thought I told you no neckin'."

Ensued truculent storming. "I'll be damned! I never heard of such an outrageous thing. Say, you little devil—"

"Well, you're hearing it now. I'm the house detective. On your way, big boy, on your way. Or do you want to see this gun closer?"

EVIDENTLY the big boy did not. Amidst further words and squeals, came the sound of departing feet. A period of silence, and then out of the gloom appeared the detective, to lean lightly against the upper hall railing, with Kitty-cat Ash Can purring and rolling at his feet.

"Wonderfully handled," complimented the host, with an effort. "Now, there was a man downstairs that looked a little suspicious—"

"Leave him to me," said the detective. "That's the kind I like to talk to."

The two trooped down the wide stairs, Host Binns' hand admiringly upon the detective's shoulder. A group of Mime Minglers were getting further mingled about the punch-bowl, and in threading among them it required only a certain amount of dexterity on the part of the host to slip his hand down the detective's shoulder and relieve his pocket of its lethal load. Then the host sidled away through the crowd, to whisk across the porch and down its steps. In the grass at the base of the nearest tree he dropped the cannon, and exhaled loudly.

The coroner had lost a rare chance for a job.

"Oh," said a voice, "so that's where you park your private stock!"

Frederick Binns jumped as though his shoes were red-hot. A young woman and a young man stood in the driveway. In the dim light the girl was seen to be smiling ironically.

It was Mary Webster.

YES, Mary Webster. Also, Morley Buck. And the pleasant feeling that had leaped up and down the Binns spine at the sight of Mary, dwindled at the sight of Morley, and further diminished as Mr. Buck spoke.

"Well, well," said Morley, with that brisk heartiness that some men know so well how to use, "look at our little host! Look at old lonesome drinker. Not sharing any? Not letting us have even one small round?" He took a step toward the tree.

A shattering laugh escaped Frederick Binns. Wouldn't he like to let Morley have a round, and not a small one, either! With a struggle he calmed himself, feeling Mary's eyes upon him.

"No," said Frederick Binns, "I don't think you'd like a round of that. Let's get on into the house."

He felt like a weakling, but what could he do? Off on the wrong foot already!

A round of punch served to ease matters a trifle, and the three added themselves to the Mime reception-room throng. The mingling had been a great success, rebounding not a little to the credit of Mrs. J. Mosby Chichester. At the present moment the purple-clad Mrs. Chichester was searching for fresh talent to act in one of a number of charades—and her bright eye fell upon Host Binns.

"Yoo-hoo! People! In the next charade we shall have none else than our gracious host himself. Come!" She caught Frederick Binns by the hand.

At the same moment Mr. Wilfred Ducey, of the noble headdress, carried away by the auspiciousness of the occasion and liquid refreshment, conceived a brilliant idea. Leaping to a chair, he cast aloft a hand and besought attention.

"Folks, I want to propose three cheers for the most popular man in Seashore!"

The most popular man in Seashore gave a horrified gasp. In a bound he was beside the Ducey chair. His arm went up; his voice went up:

"That's right, folks! Now then, all together. Three cheers for Wilfred Ducey! Hip-hip-hurray! Hip-hip-hurray! Hip-hip-hurray! Wilfred Ducey!"

Deafeningly did Seashore respond.

For the rest of that night, a dazed and choking Wilfred Ducey explained and explained to anyone he could grab hold of, that he had *not* got up on that chair so as to give three cheers for himself.

Under cover of the tumult, Host Binns swung to meet the other menace—charades. He caught at the first reed in sight, and that reed proved to be Cap Warrington.

In a fatal moment the Cap had come indoors. He hadn't chosen to come, but had been forced. Flaming youth, evicted from the upper reaches of the house by its detective, had turned to nature's own parking-places; and the Cap, walking up and down among trees and whistling through his teeth as he counted the half-hours crawling toward midnight, began to fall over people. It got on his nerves; it certainly got on the nerves of the people. So he turned indoors. And the Binns thing grabbed him.

"Awful sorry, Mrs. Chichester," bubbled the Binns thing, "but I've got to go to the kitchen to see how everything's coming along. Cap Warrington, here, will take my place. The Cap's one of the best charade actors in the State. Mrs. Chichester, let me present Mr. Warrington."

"Charmed," said Mrs. Chichester, and took the Cap by an elbow. "Now, let me see about the others. We'll want new ones; those who haven't already done any entertaining. Let me see."

Her gaze began to rove the room.

CHAPTER XVI

SAIID the largest of the three men advancing down the dark and curving driveway of the Du Port place from where they had left their car: "Now,

don't rush things. We've got to take our time and get our bearings. With a party going on like they say, it won't be hard to mix in and get started."

"And of course," growled the second, "with a party of that size, it'll be a cinch to find who we're after."

"What gets me," muttered the third, "is that dizzy chief of police in Seashore. How did *he* know we were coming? We didn't know it ourselves till yesterday; yet as soon as we check in to do a little inquiring, what does he do but tell us we've been expected for days? I tell you, the head office has an awful leak in it somewhere."

Messrs. Burke, Roscommon and Gringle of the big city, of the severely plain clothes, pondered as their feet crunched along gravel.

"Damned if I can make it out," admitted Mr. Burke. "There's sure been a leak, all right. As near as I could gather from that Swede's rigamarole, somebody's been down here disguised as a delivery-boy, who aint a delivery-boy, and who knew we were coming even before we knew it. If you can tie that, go ahead."

"And what the devil did he mean hinting about a reward?"

"I tell you," summed up Mr. Gringle, "it's either the Sheriff's office trying to slip something over on us again, or the head crook up to something himself. Whatever way you figure it, there's a master mind at work here, and we got to watch our steps."

"Here's the house," said Mr. Burke. "All set, you two?"

IN they went, to find themselves in a hall peopled solely by a punch-bowl and a small bald-headed man in shirt-sleeves. The small man seemed to be on the best of terms with the bowl. He turned to greet the latest arrivals.

"Well, good evening, gents; I suppose you'll be wanting costumes. Now, I aint got much of a stock left—"

"Costumes?" said the ponderous Mr. Burke.

"Sure. Everybody's in 'em, and you gents don't want to stand out like headlights in them everyday clothes. Look-it!" The small man indicated through the archway leading to the front reception-room, and the three newest members of the party caught sight of what looked like a convention of butterflies. "You'd sure feel out of place among all them swell dressers if you went in just as you

was. Of course, all I got left is some capes and some hats, and maybe some spears and swords—"

"Swords? Spears?"

"Sure. And flowered capes and plush hats."

"Plush hats? Say, what you trying to do, kid us?"

The Gilberstein pro-consul bristled.

"Suit yourselves, gents. I was only trying to help you, so's you wouldn't stand out conspicuous, and everybody'd be asking who you was and what was the matter with you." He returned to the amenities of the punch-bowl.

Mr. Burke, with lifting brows, caught his companions' eyes, and nodded.

"I guess you're right. When Rome, let's be Roamers. Ha, ha!"

"Now you're talking," complimented the small man, and put down an empty glass. "This way, gents." He ushered them to a side room.

WHEN the transformation scene of Burke and company was but half finished, the lights flickered and went out. "What the hell!" rose the chorus of those being transformed.

"Swell light-service, aint it?" stormed the costume artist, groping about. "Been blinking off all night. Spoiled the only good scene they had in the Indian play, right where they say, 'Behold, the sacred fire!' and the fire goes right out. Ah, there the damned t'ings come on again—an' they'll last probably five minutes."

The transformation was completed.

"Now dot's something like," beamed the one responsible. "Now you can go out and mix with the odders as care-free as you please. Honest, when you come in wearing them everyday clothes, you looked like you might have had something serious on your minds. Vell, you don't look dot way now. Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll say we don't," rumbled Mr. Burke, shouldering his way out of the room. "But there's no need making extra damn' fools of ourselves." He stared hard at a spear-carrying Mr. Roscommon.

"Then why'd you pick out a dish hat with feathers?" retorted the valiant Roscommon.

"Goddammit, I didn't pick it out!" snapped Mr. Burke. "It was put right on me. Well, now that nobody will know us,—and we won't know ourselves,—let's get some action."

They got it. No sooner had they added themselves to a group in the recep-

tion-room than a regal woman in purple gown, sweeping about her with searching eyes, paused and nodded approval. She advanced upon the newest Venetians, extending a gracious, authoritative hand.

"Just the gentlemen that I have been looking for! We are doing charades, and you three will fit in nicely. Come now, Mr. Warrington, don't you be trying to run away, after all the splendid things Mr. Binns said about you." She caught at a tall young man's coat-sleeve.

Before the three Venetians could do more than put up a feeble hand, they were being swept out of the room along with the retiring Mr. Warrington.

"Such a wonderful word that we have to act out," Mrs. Chichester confided to her players. "They'll never guess it! Now let us get together right up here on the stairs."

In the getting together, a glazed-eyed Mr. Burke contrived to get in an aside to the retiring young man of the horn-rimmed glasses.

"Damndest party I ever got in on, in my life!"

"You got nothing on me, bo," shot back the young Mr. Warrington.

"I sure want to see the bird that's giving it," said Mr. Burke.

"I'm going to," said the Cap. "Just before I go." And lightnings seemed to play about his eyes.

"Now, now," chided Mrs. Chichester archly, "let us all concentrate on the work in hand!"

OUT in the kitchen of the Du Port house, the gentleman with whom both Mr. Burke and Mr. Warrington wanted closer acquaintance tilted back his chair and radiated contentment.

"This is the best place in the whole party. I never did like charades, and Mrs. Chichester is having such a swell time running things. But I do wish, Delfus, that you'd go sit down. You came here as a guest."

"I guess just because I got my coat and vest and collar and tie off, and a knife in my hand, it don't make me no less of a guest," retorted Mr. Jones from where he stood carving ham. "If you feel more at home out here, how about me? And I couldn't have stood that starched collar another minute. Just hand me some more things to keep me busy, will you, boys? What did you say they was doing when you came out?"

"Acting out words—playing charades. After three days of acting, they can't



From the elderly Chinese exploded fifteen yards of fire-cracker English and Cantonese. "What is the creature saying?" demanded Mrs. J. Mosby Chichester. "Dead cat, indeed!"

stop; it's just like dope—and now they're down to picking on words. Why, hello, Chesterfield, what's up?"

The house detective had appeared in the kitchen like a small comet. His hat had lost its jaunty slant; his eyes were going around like pinwheels. He stayed his flight long enough to cry out:

"There's a gang of pickpockets in the house! One of 'em must have got my attention while the rest of 'em picked my gun off me. But I think I know who did it, and I'm going to kill him when I find him!"

"Oh, I wouldn't do that!" exclaimed the host. "No, I wouldn't kill him."

"Yes, I will! They needn't think they can light-finger me and git away with it." The comet resumed flight.

Guest Delfus Jones re-tucked about his waist the towel that was serving as an apron. "I'm kind of glad, in a way," he said to the kitchen, "that Chesterfield aint working for me any more."

A snort came from head cook He Gow. It was evident that one man's loss was not considered as another man's gain.

"Most midnight," observed Delfus Jones. "Better watch that door, Willie

Kee. You know Seashore when it hears about food."

"I guess I'd better trail after that house detective," said Host Binns, rising. "Thought I was through with heavy work for the evening, but I guess I'm not."

AS Frederick Binns began to shoulder his way through one end of the reception-room turmoil, Cap Warrington was clawing toward open air at the other.

"Charades!" he mouthed. "Me—and charades! And no chance to get away unless I knocked a roomful down."

Yammering, he sped into the night; under a tree, he came upon two figures. One of the figures sat propped against tree-trunk, apparently asleep. The other was swiftly going through the sleeping one's pockets. Chesterfield Wurzel had come upon Harley Gann.

A clutching hand fell upon Master Wurzel. "What the devil you doing?"

The searcher glowered up.

"Who wants to know? I'm hunting for my gat; that's what." He continued the work of pillage. "Yeah—and here it is!"

He held up a dully gleaming object.

The object was wrenched from his grasp, and at the same time he was yanked to his feet.

"You little fool," roared the Cap, after swift inspection, "that's *his* gun—caretaker's gun. What do you mean going through people's pockets?"

"What they mean going through mine? Somebody picked my gun off me, and I got my suspicions—"

"Well, you needn't have them around here. Now beat it! I'll 'tend to Gann."

"I'm tellin' you," repeated Master Wurzel. He backed a stride around the tree, then held his ground. "I'm tellin' you—"

His foot had hit against something. He kicked it aside; and as it rolled, he saw what it was.

"Hey!" he cried, and swooping picked it up. It was his gun, the cannon. Triumph flooded his face. "Didn't I tell you? He had it, and he dropped it when he seen me comin'! Oh-ho, you would, would you?" He turned it toward the reposing Mr. Gann.

IN the face of evidence so horribly overwhelming, Cap Warrington could for the moment but stand and gape. That fool Gann! Then, as on previous occasions that evening, the Cap hauled himself mentally right side up.

"Listen! Of course he took your gun. So many people had been complaining" (and they had) "that he had to get it off you. Now take it and go inside, and I'll get him to bed." With a derrick-like tug he got Caretaker Gann to his feet, and at the same time, with fierce gripping and shaking, he got him awake.

"Ow!" protested the awakened one.

"I'll 'Ow' you! Come along here."

The Gann legs were forced into motion; the Gann body took its departure along the driveway and around a corner of the house. And as it went, the person responsible for its going heaped word after word upon it. "You infernal fool! What in blazes do you mean grabbing that gat off that kid, and then passing out in plain sight? Listen! You've got just one minute to snap into it, or you'll make food for the fish. You know who's talking to you! Come on now!" The pair disappeared.

"Hoh!" cried Chesterfield Wurzel. "Didn't have my gun, hey? Maybe I aint going to keep my eye on him!" He started in pursuit.

A voice sounded from the porch. "That you out there, Chesterfield? You

come along in here and help with the supper."

"What? Me help with *supper*, when I got—"

"No matter what you got. You come along in here. And say,"—and the questioner's voice grew sharper,—"*did* you find what you were after?"

"No," growled the house detective. "I didn't find nothing." The cannon went into a pocket as he turned slow feet within doors. . . .

Slow feet, elsewhere, were being quickened as they turned seaward:

"And if you ever pull a thing like that again," concluded the Cap, "there'll be pleasant reading in the papers, but you won't be doing the reading. Now, let's get to that cove! We've got just about five minutes."

They slipped into the stable, dropped down into the short tunnel, and in a moment were in the equally dark and silence-wrapped basement. "Wait," said the Cap. He tiptoed up the stairs and listened at the kitchen door. "Couldn't be better." He rejoined a hard-breathing Harley Gann. "Getting the supper ready. I knew things would click sooner or later. They had to!" His voice rasped. "I'm going to get that bird Binns alone for one minute after we make connections—" They groped down the long, sloping tunnel.

There was a rush of salt air. The seaward door closed behind them, and they stood in the tree-screened little hollow of ground that clung above the cove. So thick was the night, with no stars showing, that but for the lazy slap of sea on shingle below, they might still have been in the tunnel.

Cap Warrington studied the illuminated face of his watch.

"On the dot."

He took from his pocket a flat flashlight, thrust aside heavy-foliaged branches, and aimed the lens seaward along the dark, towering cliffs of the cove. He snapped the button—once, twice, thrice, as fast as he could work his thumb.

Followed a wait, the Cap with eyes upon his watch. Again the light blinked—died—blinked again.

FURTHER waiting, lap of drowsy sea on shingle—high tide. Salt wind blowing, faint white of waves breaking. Darkness—sky and cliffs and sea.

A mutter came from the Cap. "Where the devil are they? What's the matter with them?"

He broke off. Eyes trained to the gloom had caught something more than sea and sky and cliffs. Something moving, coming closer over the waters.

"Here they are," he said.

He dropped over the side of the ledge. Harley Gann followed. They hastened to the edge of the water. The gray, moving something was now a boat, slowly, hesitantly slipping in toward them. A figure, leaning over its bow, cupped hands about mouth and called in a tense voice: "O. K.?"

"O. K.," answered the Cap.

"Then what the hell," flared the voice in wrath and relief, "is the idea of all those cock-eyed lights in the house? Anybody'd think you were giving a party."

"I am."

The figure at the bow almost lost balance and fell overboard. "You're *what*?"

"Listen!" Cap Warrington's voice had iron in it. "Get that boat up to shore and make it snappy!"

Obsession still claimed the figure. "You say you're givin'—"

"You heard me. Now get that boat in here."

"Just as you say," said the figure. He turned to give command. "Get her in here. . . . He says he's givin' a party. What? How do I know? Step on it!"

The boat bobbed close to shore. A small bow anchor was dropped overboard, then a stern anchor. Somebody flung a plank from bow to shore. One, two, three figures came down the plank, the first carrying a short ladder; the others, large suitcases.

"Up with it," snapped Warrington.

THE man with the ladder scurried across sand and planted the ladder against the cliff-face beneath where the tree-filled ledge clung with its tunnel mouth. As it smacked against the cliff, the first suitcase-carrier swarmed up it, tossed his load among the trees, dropped halfway back down the ladder, caught the case of the second carrier as it was handed up, and in turn flung this up into the cup. Then he was down and scuttling boatward. The other two, along with Cap Warrington, were already on board. Caretaker Harley Gann, feet wide planted, pistol in hand, stared up at the cliff-rim.

On board, a figure crouching over a machine-gun, shook a head.

"Geez, Cap, you may know what you're doin', but—givin' a party! We

seen the lights, and it was all I could do to get Lefty and the gang to come in."

"Get those suitcases ashore! In a day or two we'll have a little chat, but now, hump your backs to it! How many—sixteen?"

"Sixteen."

The process of getting the sixteen ashore and up into the tree-filled cup went drivingly on. "Eight," counted the Cap. . . . "Twelve. . . . Six—"

From the darkness of the cliff-top sounded a voice. A woman's voice.

"Yoo-hoo! Yoo-hoo! I see you boys down there!"

SEARCHLIGHTS and bombs couldn't have had greater effect.

The one of the boys who had been swinging a suitcase into the trees descended ten feet to the beach without use of ladder. The three who had been going back to the boat sailed thereto as though aided by powder. The man with the machine-gun, Harley Gann with his pistol, swung their weapons lightning-like toward whence the voice came.

But another voice arose—low, fiercely commanding: the voice of Warrington.

"Hey, you, Harley, Mike—easy there! And stop that swarming aboard! I'll 'tend to this." The Warrington voice now lifted to the cliff rim in lilting falsetto. "Yoo-hoo, yoo-hoo yourself, up there! I see you too!"

"Are you coming up?" demanded the cliff-rim person.

"Yes, in just a minute." The Cap pawed at memory. Not for nothing was he acquainted with Seashore and its doings. "We came in to see if the other boats could make it, all right; a lot of us have rowed around from the lagoon. We're going out now to tell them that everything's just fine." Again his voice dropped, and scorchingly he spoke to those about him: "Get it unloaded, get it unloaded! And yoo-hoo back. All of you, damn you, yoo-hoo there!"

On the dark, salt night air rose a chorus of yoo-hoos and yodels that, considering the situation, did credit to the vocalists. There was a desperate running ashore; up went the last suitcase to the tunnel-mouth. The carriers raced back, tumbled aboard ship, the last one carrying the ladder. The plank was drawn in; anchors were heaved. The boat began to slip away.

"Not too fast at first," commanded Cap Warrington from the water-side.

"Damn you, not so fast! Do you think rowboats can go that fast?"

"Rowboats, hell!" came back answer. "We're pulling out of here. You and your damn' party!"

"I'll party you the next time I see you," retorted the Cap across the waters. "Call up good-by to 'em, if you don't want me to fill you full of lead. We've got a get-away to make too, you damn' fools."

"Good-by, good-by," rose the falsetto chorus from the vanishing boat. "Be back soon. . . . Good-by, good-by!"

"Quick!" Cap Warrington and Harley Gann sped for the cliff-face below the cup. "Give me a leg up." The Cap swung himself up to the Gann shoulders, stood erect, caught at a tree limb, hauled himself up onto the ledge. He ripped off his coat, lay face down, dropped one end of the coat. Harley Gann grabbed at it, and in a moment had been hauled up and had disappeared among the trees.

Nothing living was to be seen in the cove. Nothing moved on the waters of the cove. Darkness and sea and wind.

A watching Cap Warrington flexed taut muscles.

"It was some one of that goofy Binns' goofier friends walking around. Fast work now, and we'll make it, while the goof has gone to the house to tell about the rowboats. Come on!"

He flung open the tunnel door, caught up two of the suitcases and started along

the tunnel, going as swiftly as the narrow tunnel and heavy cases would permit. Harley Gann, similarly laden, followed at his heels. They toiled up to the door that gave on the basement; and here the Cap and then Harley dropped their loads. The Cap eased open the door. A sliver of light at the top of the basement stairs—nothing more. Silence and darkness.

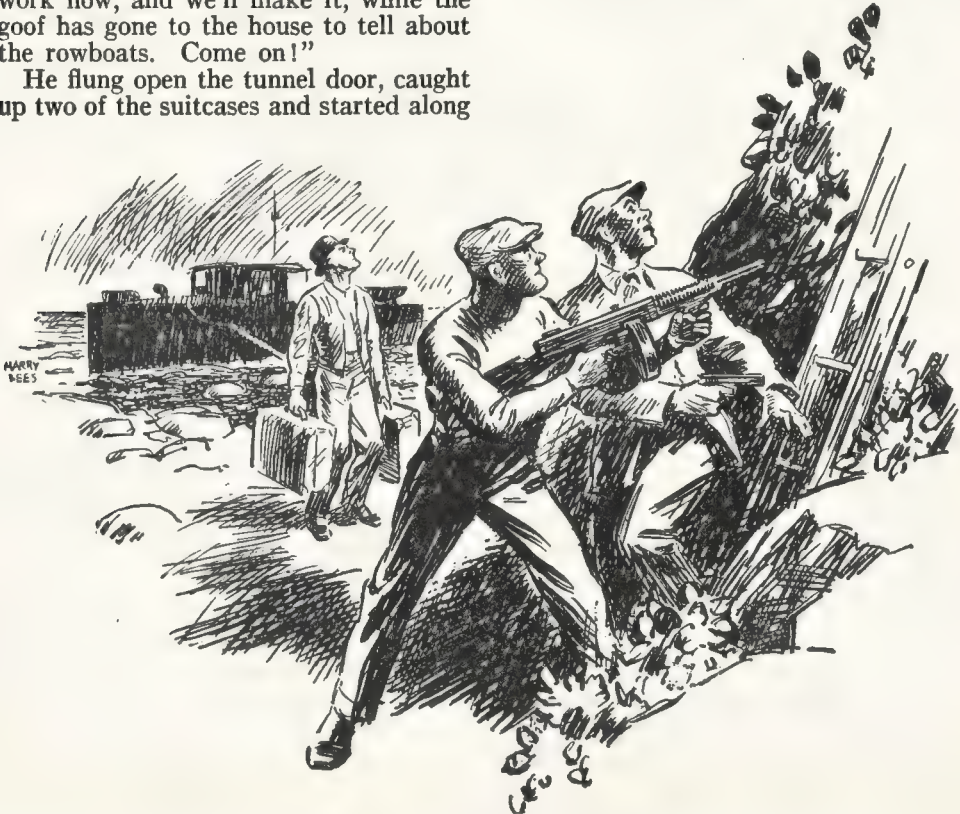
The Cap grabbed his cases. "Get 'em into the basement. Cover 'em with those sacks. Stack 'em between those two crates. . . . That's it. Now back for more."

Four times they made the trip, racing down the tunnel, struggling back up it, stacking the suitcases into hiding.

"Sixteen," said the Cap. "Now listen! I'm going out to reconnoiter; if the way's clear, we'll hustle these out through the stable and to my car. Meantime, you stay here."

A door clicked—clicked again. The Cap was in the tunnel leading to the stable.

Caretaker Harley Gann leaned against a crate and gave himself over to continuous hoarse breathing. Hour-long minutes went their creeping way; si-



lence and darkness continued; the sliver of light at the top of the stairs remained only a sliver. Gradually he breathed easier. It wasn't going to be so bad, after all; the Cap would be back in a minute; the suitcases would be taken out to his car, and they'd be away.

The stable tunnel door-latch clicked. There was the Cap now. Now for some fast carrying!

It was the Cap, all right, but a different Cap from the one who had gone out.

"I might have known it!" seethed the Cap. "Might have known that a man like him would have people like that around. Can't get the car out! Parked it where nobody would think of anybody else parking, except fools; and three of the world's prizest have done just that. Shoved till I almost broke my back. We simply got to wait until this gosh-awful party lets out, and who knows when that'll be? Good Lord—"

The basement had become flooded with light. The door at the top of the stairs opened, and a Niagara of people began to pour down, with the Binns person and the charade woman in the lead.

"I'll show you the tunnels," the Binns person was saying. "Yes, indeed, this place must have been romantic once. Why—why, hello." The Binns eyes had fallen upon Caretaker Harley Gann and his visiting friend Cap Warrington. The Binns mind arrived at its own logical conclusions. "Now, now, Harley, you don't have to be caretaker tonight, or feel that you must be around the place seeing that everything is right side up. I'm just showing Mrs. Chichester and others certain parts of the house, and they wanted to have a peek at the old recluse's tunnels. —Now, Mrs. Chichester, right along here somewhere—"

The tunnel doors yielded themselves up, and "Oh's" and "Ah's" filled the basement. When the sightseers had looked their fill at empty tunnels and speculated on them to their hearts' content, the host-guide waved a casual hand about the basement.

"The rest is just junk—sacks and such things. Now let's go right upstairs to supper. —And say, listen, you boys." He put friendly hands upon the Gann and Warrington shoulders. "No more work for tonight. You're coming right upstairs to eat with us."

The demurrer that followed was a classic in emphasis, but all to no avail.

"Now just forget that," countered Mr.



"Yoo-hoo! Yoo-hoo! I see you boys down there!"

Binns. "We're all one big family tonight. No need feeling bashful. So up you go. Come on, folks, up they go."

Up they went. With a dozen Mime Minglers taking hold of an arm or a leg, there was nothing to it but going. Cap Warrington contrived to smile, but as he took sandwiches and pickles and coffee, he named a bullet for Frederick Alonzo Binns.

Now there would have been nothing for the Cap to worry about, absolutely nothing, if Nephew Willie Kee, super-animated out in the kitchen, hadn't dropped a kettle of water. A kettle of water on a kitchen floor does not make for the most secure footing. In a stirring rapid-fire of condemnation, Cook He Gow supervised the mopping up with whatever lay at hand; but little, however, lay at hand; and He Gow, ever a believer in the precept if you want a thing done, do it yourself, punched a light switch beside a door, and descended into that first-aid department of all homes, the basement.

A pile of sacks caught the sweeping eye of He Gow. Sacking is not the best material in the world for mopping, but it is better than nothing. Cook He Gow seized a double-handful of sacking, and tugged. Then He Gow stopped tugging, and stared. . . .

A face—the He Gow face—that had been the despair of other poker-players for years unnumbered, appeared before a group of supper partakers in a reception-room.

"See you, minute," announced Cook He Gow to Host Frederick Binns. "No savvy about this food." The poker face withdrew.

"That cook of mine," apologized the host, rising, "is getting worse and worse. If he stays in the family another forty years, there won't be any living with him. Coming, He Gow."

"This coffee—" said He Gow, in English. "Keep face straight and follow," said He Gow, in Cantonese.

NEXT to He Gow, Frederick Binns had the best poker-face, when desired, that it had been the misfortune of many men to see.

The kitchen door leading to the basement opened, closed, for cook and host. Down dark stairs went the two. A moment of shuffling feet, a pause, and a match flamed, then glowed dully in the cupped hands of the Binns cook. The cupped hands moved, swung above something—a suitcase, a large, worn suitcase, with a split top only partly closed by two straps. Within the case, through the split, in the glow of the match, were to be seen small, flat tins.

"Bad men," said the match-holding cook He Gow.

The human mind, when it takes the notion to, can cover an incredible amount of ground with the speed of a lightning-bolt flashing from cloud to earth.

"Yes," said Frederick Alonzo Binns. "Bad men, He Gow."

For the space of time it takes one to count three slowly, he continued peering at the suitcase—at many suitcases. Then he had completed his plans.

"Go back to kitchen, He Gow. Keep right on with supper. I handle this. Savvy?"

"Savvy." He Gow shuffled away.

With a heave, the owner of Du Port place, and the host to a hundred guests upstairs, caught up two of the suitcases into his arms, lifted them high, and threw himself into the black maze of the cumbered basement. Smacking, bumping, staggering now and then, he fought his way through the tortuous lane that he had clawed out the night he had searched for the chimney with its hidden door. He came jarringly against the chimney, dropped his load, began swiftly searching for the key brick in the face of the wall: "*Press third brick from left in tenth row.*" He pressed. The brick gave. The smell of dead air was in his nostrils.

One—two—the suitcases went into the vault. He whirled about and lunged back through the maze. . . . Journey after journey: twice into the vault to

drag and stack, up and up. . . . Back through the maze. . . .

Then, on the last journey, it came: somebody in the basement—somebody moving. Hair-trigger ears told him that. Silently he eased down his load before the vault door, crept inside, drew the cases in after him. With infinite slowness, lest the rusted hinges squeak, he swung the door nearer, nearer closed, momentarily expecting the flash and roar of a pistol, the crash of bullet in his face.

The brick door closed—locked.

He was inside. Inside the secret vault of the old Frenchman Du Port. Inside, with all of the tin-crammed suitcases.

Indeed, just in time.

Cap Warrington, seated beside Mrs. Chichester and listening to an enthralling discourse on the Little Theater Movement, had watched Host Binns follow his cook into the kitchen without any feeling of trepidation. Cooks had trouble, and so did hosts. It was only when the host did not return after a measurable length of time that Cap Warrington got to his feet.

"I just happened to remember," he told Mrs. Chichester. "Be back in a moment. —Oh, Harley!"

The two wove their way through reception-rooms jammed with supper-attacking Venetians and Indians, crossed front hall and porch, then streaked around the corner of the house.

"Stay here and keep your eyes open!" crackled the Cap as they slipped inside the stable door. "Here!" He thrust the Wurzel-snatched Gann pistol into the caretaker's hand. Then he whipped aside the bran-bin and darted down into tunnel blackness.

At the basement door he paused, listening, and in one hand was a flat, automatic pistol. With infinite care he edged open the door, pistol-muzzle at widening crack. Something—he strained his ears. . . . No sound. He worked his way through the opening and across to where the suitcases were stacked beneath the sacking. He put out a searching hand. Sacking, yes. But nothing else.

The suitcases were gone!

CHAPTER XVII

WHEN a star-eyed Lotus Givens had come bounding into the Du Port mansion with the news that numberless galleys were in the cove, it was upon a crowded front hall that she first burst.

The front hall was having a jolly clink-around at the punch-bowl. Clink-arounders at punch-bowls are a credulous race; and in almost no time at all they were tripping, figuratively and literally, after Miss Givens toward the dark cove rim. But after five minutes of yoo-hooing without answer, the clink-arounders straggled back to the front hall, expressing belief that Miss Givens had slipped a fast one over on them. Galleys in the cove. Haw! That was a good one!

A bewildered and indignant Miss Givens had then gone on farther into the house to cast her bread of information upon calmer waters. At any rate, came the statement, a boat *had* been seen in the cove.

THREE heavy-set gentlemen wearing capes and plush hats, with one of them holding a spear, were standing in a corner of the rear reception-room, using eyes and ears to best advantage, when the news hit them. They went into a furious huddle.

"I knew it!" cried Mr. Burke, red to his ears. "Didn't we say that there was a master mind here? Got us into these fool costumes and playing charades—*charades*!—so they could make the landing. I'll bet that old dame was at the bottom of it. Come on!"

The shortest route to the scene of the landing apparently lay by way of the dining-room and kitchen, but it was now proved that a straight line is not necessarily the shortest. Supper was being announced—come and get it!

"Hey!" cried twenty voices. "Who you shoving? Wait your turns there."

The seekers after truth turned and thudded toward the front hall. They had almost reached it when the leading Mr. Burke stopped running, like a man whose feet have broken down.

"Look!" said Mr. Burke with a choking voice.

"What?" said the others.

Mr. Burke indicated a stocky man with blue eyes and a gray, bristling mustache.

"It's old Webster. The man behind the Sheriff's office." Mr. Burke threw out helpless, hamlike hands. His voice became more hollow. "I told you there was a leak. I'll bet that old devil has got everything tied up right now. But leave it to me; I may save something for us."

Clarendon Webster looked up from coffee to find confronting him three men

who, but for their garments, might have been modern piano-movers.

"Hello, Webster," greeted the largest. "We'd like a word with you. I'll admit that you've got us on the hip, but there may be two or three things that you don't know."

The stare that Mr. Webster bestowed upon the piano-mover would have been called blank by some; but others, priding themselves in their ability to read faces, would have called it coldly calculating. Thus did Mr. Burke.

"We're Burke, Roscommon and Gringle," he said. "Down from the Federal office. Mind if we step outside where we can be by ourselves?"

"Not at all," said the Sheriff's power, with splendidly cloaking crispness. "I wonder," he communed to himself as he stepped, "what the devil they're up to?"

"As you know," said Mr. Burke when on the porch steps, "a load has just come ashore. I needn't tell you that. But the point is, we know it as well as you do. We know some other things. Now, do we go it fifty-fifty?"

Mr. Webster thrust out his chin. When in doubt, make the other man keep on talking.

"I can't promise a thing. Not until you've told me all you know."

"I was afraid you'd be a tough one to handle," confessed Mr. Burke. "Well, here's the lay."

AT the conclusion of Mr. Burke's lay, Clarendon Webster, power behind the Sheriff, smacked his hands together.

"By gad," he exploded, "I might have known it of him!"

"You know this head guy?"

"Know him? I've known him all my life." Mr. Webster exploded again. "The nerve, the colossal nerve of him! Trying to pull the wool over my eyes—giving me a song-and-dance about being shot at by a drunken caretaker—and—throwing a party while landing the stuff! The impudence, the downright gall!" Mr. Webster became a shade more crimson. "I always wondered where he got all his extra money—trips around the world—buying this house—Say! He's done enough. Come on!"

"Come on where?" not unreasonably asked Mr. Burke.

"Come on and get him."

"You think he's still here?"

"Of course he is. That's just his sort. Brass enough to stay right here and cover up the get-away crowd's tracks."



"Hey!" rose a bawling cry. But Frederick Alonzo Binns was no longer there to be heyed; two wild leaps, and he had reached a door.

"But how about the stuff?"

"Once I get hold of him, he'll come through with the stuff. Damned cub! Now,"—and the Sheriff's power drew himself up,—*"I don't know as I'll need all three of you, but you can come along as witnesses. Let's rout him out. Knew his father—but I got to do my duty."*

A DOOR in an attic room of the Du Port house opened cautiously, and the grimy host of a jolly party,—who had just put three flights of secret stairway between himself and a stack of suitcases snug within the chimney vault,—now slipped out into the attic's silent darkness and took a steadying breath.

It had happened! *Happened!* His pulses were going hit and hammer. All that he had hoped for had come to pass. The cove, the tunnels, the old house—Gann and Warrington. Warrington was the bird he must get. And he'd *get* him!

He'd stalk the Cap down. Gun—he'd need a gun. That was it! Chesterfield's gun—out under the tree.

He slipped down the attic stairs, and something came bounding along the hall.

"Prrraouw!" said the something.

Kitty-cat Ash Can, having mislaid the

house detective, was greeting the next-best bet for an interesting time.

"Don't," said Frederick Binns, dry of throat, "don't do that again!"

He started down the front stairs.

A group of men came in from the porch. Clarendon Webster was one of them. He caught sight of Mr. Binns.

"Just a moment, young man! I want to see you." He started up the stairs.

"I don't know as I've got the minute," remarked young Mr. Binns.

"Oh, I guess you'll have that minute," was the retort. "I and my friends here want to chat with you. Alone! Let's go back upstairs."

The host slowly erased a scowl. What the devil was it? Some Seashore deputation wanting him to run for office? And why the mumbo-jumbo secrecy? Good night—at a time like this! He crossed the upper hall, snapped on a light in the huge bedroom where he had slept the previous night, and turned to say: "Well, gentlemen?"

"You're under arrest," said Clarendon Webster.

"Huh?"

"Now, don't get tough! We know all about your landing the stuff—I and my

Federal friends here. Come clean, and it may not go so hard with you. Act tough, and you'll get the limit."

Numbing realization flooded Frederick Binns.

"Why, you damned old fool!"

"Here!" cried Messrs. Burke, Roscommon and Gringle, closing in. "None of that, now! We've got you. Now, where's the stuff?"

They put out gripping hands. But at that instant the lights flickered, dimmed, gulped blindingly out.

"Hey!" rose a bawling cry.

But Frederick Alonzo Binns was no longer there to be heyed.

A leap—two wild leaps—and he had reached a door, a closet door. His hand fell upon its knob. He flung the door wide, and as he flung it, he snatched the key from its lock. Then he was inside the closet, had slammed the door shut, was thrusting key into lock, bracing the door at the same time with his shoulder. The lock clicked. He whirled to paw aside racked clothing, to feel along panel-work on the closet's inner wall.

Something struck the closet door with a resounding crash. Another crash. The door started to splinter. But the searching Frederick Binns had found what he wanted. . . .

The closet door fell in. At the same moment the lights came on.

"We got you!" stormed Mr. Burke. "Come out from behind them clothes!"

"Put 'em up and come out!" bellowed Mr. Gringle.

Neither request being complied with, the clothes were smacked down.

"Hell!" rose the storm. "Hell!"

From the doorway an onlooking Mr. Roscommon gave tongue.

"You fools, I told you he didn't go in there! Think he'd jump into a closet? He shut and locked that door as a blind, then doubled back in the dark and run for the stairs. C'mon!"

Heavy feet sounded. Also sounded the voice of Clarendon Webster.

"He'll be somewhere in the house—he's that blasted clever. And we had him right in our hands!"

FREDERICK BINNS leaned against his sanctuary wall and swore bitterly. Like other men in similar crises, his thoughts for the moment raged around the minor instead of the major affair. They'd smashed in his door and knocked all his clothes onto a dusty floor. Damn 'em, he'd sue them! He'd—



A pair of luminous green eyes stared up at him. Kitty-cat Ash Can had been as swift as Frederick Binns in getting through doors.

There was a further leaning against the wall, and a wheezing. "You damned cat! Want to—scare me to death? Out you go!" He reached for the paneling, but wiser thought raced in. The evicted one would stand and claw and miaow outside; and searchers—

"All right," hoarsed young Mr. Binns. "But don't you dare miaow."

"Praw," said Ash Can, and began to strop his claws against a Binns leg.

The old fools! Butting in and wrecking everything—yes, and standing a good chance of wrecking themselves. If they blundered into the Cap and started any hands-up stuff, somebody was going to get bumped—completely and irrevocably.

F. Alonzo Binns swarmed down ladderlike stairs toward the basement. Plans all changed. . . . He hadn't a glow-worm of an idea what he'd do, but he'd have to do something. A purring and bright-eyed Ash Can followed. This was the life.

The host of a jolly party fell into the vault alongside the stacked suitcases of such evil portent. He put out a hand, and the hand encountered bricks—not bricks mortared into the wall, but loosely piled bricks that he had seen the time he searched vault and stairways, bricks

left piled by some one long ago. Left piled for what?

Incandescently the answer came to Frederick Binns. The answer to all his questions. He seized a suitcase.

At the same moment, Kitty-cat Ash Can reached the conclusion he didn't like the vault, and started back-tracking, voicing disapproval as he went.

"Hey!" gasped Frederick Binns. But Kitty-cat was headed for the attic, growing more vocal as he went.

Frederick Binns groaned. That finished it. Now he *was* sunk! It would be all over in no time. Like an insane porter handling suitcases, he surged to his task.

SEATED at table beside a wall of the reception-room, near its fireplace, Mrs. J. Mosby Chichester left off spooning sugar into coffee and held up a hand.

"Hark! Did you hear that?"

"Hear what?" asked the Chichester entourage, sitting up and showing a little animation.

"It sounded like a moan, or a wail—like a voice coming from afar, yet seeming near at hand. As though," concluded Mrs. Chichester, having at last caught the right note, "as though it were in the very walls of the house itself!"

This was pretty good stuff, and the entourage said so.

"Hark!" commanded the leader of higher thought. "It seemed that I heard it again. There! . . . No, it's gone. A wail—yes, a wail like a banshee."

"I thought I heard it too," agreed several of the satellites. "Creepy. Hard to tell where it did come from."

"Like the wail of a banshee," repeated Mrs. Chichester, "crying its sorrow through the walls of the house. Ah, if this were only romantic old Ireland!—Mercy on us, who's this person?"

An elderly Chinese, carrying a long knife in either hand, had stopped before the Chichester table. From him exploded fifteen yards of firecracker English and Cantonese.

"What is the creature saying?" demanded Mrs. J. Mosby Chichester.

Young Mr. Arbuthnot Walbridge, of the Venetian lavender suit and waxed mustache, seemed to have got the most out of the English part of the barrage.

"He says that bad men have killed his cat—that its spirit is floating around demanding revenge, and that he's going to help the spirit get it."

"How insane! I don't see how Mr. Binns keeps such a creature. Dead cat, indeed! Keep him away from us!"

Keeping, however, was not necessary. The spirit song had gone ceilingward, and thither went He Gow by the front stairs, knives ready. In the upper hall he collided with a youthful figure.

"Gettum hell out of way!" he ripped.

"Oh, hello, He Gow," greeted the house detective. "Where's the fire?"

The fast-padding older person went on into the big bedroom swiftly, and the detective followed.

The banshee was going nobly.

"What's 'at?" said Chesterfield.

He was told.

"Hoh, 'at aint no dead cat! 'At's a live cat caught somewhere in one of the rooms."

Flames played about the He Gow eyes. "I always say you damn' fool boy."

House detectives have to put up with a lot of things.

"'At's a live cat," repeated the detective evenly. "Old Ash Can. Well, I aint got anything to do for a minute, seeing that neckin's kind of played out, so I'll find him for you. You go back to carving ham."

"Carve people," said He Gow; and the knife-carrier again betook himself downstairs.

At which sight Mrs. Chichester spilled coffee.

"No wonder the modern Chinese are what they are—bloodthirsty and killing each other off in civil wars. Where has their fine old-time romance gone?"

WHERE, for that matter, had a heavy-set young man and sixteen suitcases gone? Pointedly were Mr. Clarendon Webster and companions asking this as they charged about the grounds. Pointedly were Cap Warrington and Harley Gann repeating the same from ambush near the stable, in a mood to shoot at anything on sight.

"And we took him for a dumb-bell," over and over repeated Mr. Warrington. "Brightest Federal I ever saw. *Only* bright Fed I ever saw. He let us land the stuff and lug it up; and then—" Memory seemed too much for Mr. Warrington. He rose.

"Where you going?" queried Mr. Gann, also rising. He had no desire for being left alone.

"If you want to live, you stay right where you are," hinted the Cap. "And be here when I get back. The least like-

ly place where that stuff has been hidden, is right in the basement. And that's just where I'm going to look."

A cat-footed Cap Warrington, however, got only as far as inside the stable doorway. Here, half in his stride, he leaped aside into deep shadow, crouched, and froze into position. Over by a faintly discernible bin, against a box-stall wall, something was moving, was coming up through the floor. Something was being shoved up, like earth cast by a gopher working below-ground. It came to rest on the floor.

Silence for a moment; then again a shoving-up—again—and again. . . . A growing mound beside the bin. And now a figure heaving up through the blackness, to stand over the mound and exhale mightily.

"Whoowie! But that was work."

Then the gun of Cap Warrington was in the figure's ribs, and the Cap snarling: "Stick 'em up!"

"So," finally went on the Cap slowly. "You almost got away with it, but you didn't quite."

A hard-breathing Frederick Alonzo Binns, owner of the Du Port place and host of a jolly party, tried to shift position.

"Stay just as you are," said the Cap, "or you'll get it." He jammed the gun tighter against the Binns ribs.

"If you don't mind my saying so," protested young Mr. Binns, "that gun-muzzle of yours is tickling me; and if I should happen to sneeze—"

"Cut it!" snapped the Cap. "You've clowned around here long enough. It won't work. Trying to get away with 'em, eh?" His glance flicked over the suitcases heaped upon the stable floor.

"Sure!" said the other defiantly. "And I almost did. Well, what are you going to do about it?"

"That," retorted the Cap softly, "is going to be for me to say."

Frederick Binns grunted. "Then you don't think that the Sheriff's crowd and the Federal men are going to have a thing to say?"

It was an ugly laugh that Cap Warrington pleased himself with. "When I've finished with you, you won't be quite so funny."

"THEY'RE somewhere around the grounds," went on the Binns person, "and they may make trouble." He now also laughed. "Listen, big boy, *you're* the dumb guy. Did you really figure

me for a Sheriff's man or a Federal officer? Say, you were even easier than I thought you were; but I might have known it from the way you swallowed that one about the phony deed to the place, and then this cover-up party that I'm throwing. Don't you get it yet, dummy? High-jack!"

FOR a long moment there was silence in the dark stable.

"Does it begin to percolate?" went on Frederick Binns. "I posed as the owner, and it worked clean as a whistle. High-jacked you and had the stuff salted away where I could come back for it later—and then the Federals and the Sheriff's men jumped me." He chuckled. "You must have bungled your hand something awful, Warrington—if that is your name; because they knew all about it. I had to break cover with the stuff, and by fool's luck you've showed up."

Cap Warrington was breathing hard. "I've a notion to drop you right here."

"I wouldn't. Place is alive with dicks. How about our teaming up, going fifty-fifty, and beating it right now in my machine? Seems like we've stood around here long enough."

Whatever may have been furiously revolving in the mind of Cap Warrington, it did not show on the surface. He ran a swift hand over the Binns frame. . . . No weapons.

"Drop your hands," he rapped out. "Pick up two of those cases. Now, out you go toward the road, and you keep inside that fringe of low trees."

A voluminous sigh escaped the suitcase-carrying Binns. "I knew you'd be sensible. What'll it be, fifty-fifty?"

"You'd be surprised," returned the Cap lightly. "Hey, stop right here. —Harley! You dumb-head, are you asleep behind those trees?"

Mr. Gann was neither asleep nor light-footed. He came crashing out.

"Why not a brass band, too?" volleyed the Cap. "Yeah, go ahead and look at him." The pop eyes of Mr. Gann, now on the Cap's companion, were at extra pop. "Our little chum!" went on the Cap. "The house owner. Or maybe he isn't the house owner. I'm not sure yet—not that it matters. Yeah, the suitcases. More in the stable by the trap-door. Beat it, and grab two and come back here. Beat it, I say!"

In a moment the procession, now made up of three marchers, two of them car-

riers and one a gun-holder, threaded through undergrowth toward the road. At the road, still among trees, it halted.

"Put 'em down," said the Cap. "Now we'll go after the rest. And it'll be just too bad for you, funny boy, if these out here by the road are missing when we get back. Not but what it isn't going to be too bad, anyway."

It seemingly took all of a round trip for this last to penetrate the Binns skull.

"Say, I don't like the way you hinted about things being too bad for me. We made an agreement—"

ONCE more the Warrington gun-muzzle found lodging-place against the Binns ribs. The Warrington laugh was as ugly as it was short.

"You should have gone into vaudeville."

The remaining trips were made in silence. But when the last one had been completed, the irrepressible Binns creature again broke out: "My car's down in the drive somewhere. Now—say, that isn't your car that you're looking at. It belongs to a young fellow who—"

"Will you dry up?" said Cap Warrington. He continued studying the parked car before him. It was a new, powerful, gaudily painted touring car, with top down. "She'll do. Sling 'em into the tonneau."

When half had been slung in, the Binns slinger paused. "Now, I'll just leave the rest here until I get my hack out; then I'll load up, and—"

"Your comedy is about played out," said the Cap. "Get 'em in."

They were got in.

"But I don't see—" protested young Mr. Binns.

"All in?" The question was shot at Caretaker Harley Gann.

"All in, Chief." The Gann voice was finally back on its splendidly pompous level again.

"Gun ready?"

"O. K."

"All right now, funny boy. Listen to me." The Cap's face was close to Binns'. "You're going to get into the tonneau with Harley. You're going to ride with us a piece. Then you're going to get your part of the fifty-fifty split." He nudged the Binns waist with his automatic. "Does it begin to percolate?"

"You mean you're going to take me for a ride? That you're going to—"

"Absolutely. In you go."

The Binns face was close to the War-

ington face. It drew back, and a smile went across it.

"That's a good one! For a minute I thought you meant it. Now let's talk this thing over."

But here the smile went off the Binns face. The Binns eyes were no longer on the Cap. They had shifted suddenly just to one side of him, and were now fixed horrifiedly on something close behind the Cap's back. And the horror of the Binns eyes found companion in his voice.

"For God's sake, Ed," he cried, throwing up a hand, "don't shoot a man in the back!"

For a fraction of a second Cap Warrington's eyes left Frederick Binns as he convulsively started to swing his head around. Only for the fraction of a second, but long enough. The oldest trick in the world, but so well done that it worked. The Binns fist went out. It got home to the Warrington jaw. The Cap went down.

Caretaker Harley Gann had been standing beside the Cap. He likewise had turned—nobody likes to get shot in the back. He had been slower at turning than his Chief, but stayed turned longer. The other Binns fist did very well. But the Gann left hand, swinging blindly, managed to connect smack with one of the Alonzo Binns eyes. Then Mr. Gann was down, lying prone across Cap Warrington; and Alonzo Binns, with one eye bunged shut, was crashing through brush and zigzagging away.

Last down, first up; and Harley Gann had got in three shots at nowhere before Cap Warrington could knock the gun from his hand.

"You damn' fool! No use shooting now! Get aboard!"

The speed with which the suitcase-crammed touring car was started and sent roaring away in first gear—second gear, high—would have delighted the car's makers, if not its owner.

CHAPTER XVIII

"WELL, it worked," mused he of the smacked eye, now going in for straight foot-racing toward the front porch. "Touch and go, but it worked. Whoovie, this eye is going to be a pip! But I guess Harley owed me that much."

He arrived at the porch; and then, like some guest not sure of his social status, lingered in its shadows instead of enter-



Cap Warrington's eyes left Frederick Binns only for the fraction of a second—but the Binns fist got home to the Warrington jaw.

ing. Lingered thus for a moment, until a stocky man came pattering down the wide front stairs, his face redder than red, his mustache white by contrast.

"Just like a play," breathed the watching Frederick Alonzo Binns. "I'll bet Mrs. Chichester would get a drive out of this."

The power behind the Sheriff, having exhausted everything else, had gone back to the scene of the escape; and now, unhampered by Messrs. Burke, Roscommon and Gringle, was reconstructing it all over again. He had got almost through the hall that was empty both as to punch-bowl and people, when a hand gripped his arm, and something hard was pressed into the small of his back.

He twisted—to see a grimed and grim Frederick Binns. His mouth opened.

"Not a word!" said F. Binns. "Otherwise, no spine left. This way, snappy. Open that door and go on in."

The butt-end of a flashlight can at times feel very much like the muzzle of a revolver. Clarendon Webster opened the door under the stairs and went on in. The door closed upon him and his captor. Darkness engulfed them.

But now Clarendon W. showed signs that he was on an even keel again. Words exploded.

"Look here, Frederick, you damned fool—"

"You are standing on a trapdoor," said the damned fool. "If I trip the catch, you'll fall a hundred feet down a well, and your body will be washed out to sea. And you'll never be heard of again."

"All right, trip the catch!" came roar. "Trip it and be damned to you!"

Frederick Alonzo Binns grinned in the dark. Good old sport! No use trying to bluff a Webster.

"All right, just for that I won't. But I will shift this flashlight to where it's more needed, and search along this paneling, and—"

The paneling swung open. The flashlight's beam swept down into a brick vault—a vault piled up and up with myriad small tins.

A whistling breath came from one of the onlookers.

"We can get a better view if we go down in," suggested Frederick Binns. "I'll go first, if you're still under the impression that I'm the gang leader and might shove you."

They went. And a goggle-eyed Webster senior put hands upon the tins and finally contrived to make words.

"Opium. Opium tins. Thousands of them!"

"Exactly, although I haven't had time to count them. And you won't have, either, if you're thinking of catching the criminals. From the way the caretaker and his friend were traveling in Morley Buck's car, you'll have to step lively. I believe new cars shouldn't be driven at an excessive speed, but Mr. Buck can take that up with the factory."

Clarendon Webster finally contrived to tug his eyes away from the hypnotic sight and to meet the Binns gaze. His voice boomed.

"A hundred thousand dollars' worth, if it's worth a nickell!"

"Easily. And think of the thrilling headlines in the papers — WEBSTER BREAKS UP OPIUM RING. VINDICATION FOR SHERIFF'S OFFICE. How's that? You can leave me right out of it; I've had my fun. Give the Federal boys as little or as much as you want—and the Seashore chief hasn't been such a bad old egg."

A Webster hand went slowly across the Webster forehead. "Of course, of course! But what I don't understand—but what I don't understand is how these men should come to leave—" Clarendon Webster gestured helplessly about the Ali Baba vault.

F. Alonzo Binns permitted himself a chuckle; he felt he had earned it.

"They don't understand it either, but I haven't the time to explain now, nor you to listen. Grab some of these tins for evidence—cram 'em in your pockets—and get on to Seashore. What between telegraph and telephone—but pshaw, I don't need to have to tell you and those Fed boys how to catch criminals."

They climbed out of the vault, shut paneled door behind them; and there came to them the sound of heavy feet running out in the hall.

"Hark!" said Frederick Binns. "That's the Federal men now. Nobody could have heavier feet."

IN corroboration, a voice blared—the Burke voice.

"Come on, come on, Gringle! They've made their get-away out in the road! Come on!"

Clarendon Webster gave joyous breath. "Leave 'em to me. I'll handle things. You stay here and guard."

The beneath-stairs door opened and closed upon the power behind the Sheriff. That the power possessed the ability of handling things was evident when, after the briefest of intervals, there was added to voices the reverberation of feet, heavy feet, departing porchward. Going—gone!

THE host to a jolly costume-party tumbled his head through the door. Yes, all gone. He emerged into the hall, and now a sort of wistfulness descended upon him, if a man with an eye approaching the hue of an egg-plant can be said to look wistful. . . . It would be hoping too much; it certainly would—

But it wasn't. Through the archway leading from the reception-room came Morley Buck, good old handsome care-free collar-advertisement Morley. He came up to the punch-bowl, sought out two glasses, and began to ladle punch remnants into them. A light tune was on his lips.

Frederick Alonzo Binns, with the one good eye dancing joyously, ranged alongside. Mr. Buck glanced up, and the ladle remained suspended in air.

"Well, well, look who ran into a door! Yes, yes, of course, a door."

"Always right," was the bubbling Binns response. "But I haven't come here to talk about architecture. I—well, you see—" Young Mr. Binns seemed to have become bereft of ready words. "Well I suppose I've got to tell you—you'd hear about it sooner or later. But then,"—and a hopeful look supplanted the worried one,— "maybe you didn't come in your own car tonight!"

"But I did!" snapped Mr. Buck.

"Gee, that's tough. Well, you see, I've just come from out in the road, and—"

Mr. Buck lowered the ladle. A sickening premonition flashed about beneath patent-leather hair. The new car was the apple of the Buck eye.

"Something's happened to it? Somebody backed into it?"

"No, Morley, there wasn't any backing. It was all fronting. I tried to tell 'em it wasn't their car, but—" Frederick Binns put a hand to his eye.

"What d'you mean?"

"Thieves, I guess. Even when lying flat, where I had been knocked down, I tried to yell after them that no new car should be driven in second gear at fifty miles an hour, and how it would ruin everything, but by that time they were over the first little knoll."

"Yow!" howled Morley Buck, and he shot madly through the front door.

The Binns news-reel somehow managed to keep alongside.

"Why they should have picked on your car, I don't know. But the best officers in the State are after 'em; they're out in the road now, getting their car out from a jam of other cars; and if you run like the devil—"

Morley Buck ran like the devil. Night and the driveway claimed him. He was gone.

F. Alonzo Binns strolled back toward the Du Port house, shaking his head.

"Excitable young fellow, Morley. Awfully excitable."

He went up porch steps, entered the hall and crossed to the punch-bowl; taking up the ladle, he began to fill two punch-glasses. When they were filled, he picked them up with a flourish; and his manner was that of the world at sunrise. But just then—

From somewhere within the upper reaches of the house there came the muffled, rolling sounds of gunfire, of howls and yowls. The gunfire continued; so did howls and yowls. They descended, came nearer, held even for an instant, passed on down, to die out in the regions below. Then silence.

A person, or persons, had fallen down the secret stairs.

F. Alonzo Binns dropped the two filled glasses, and propelled himself toward the nether regions by back hall, kitchen and basement. At the foot of the basement stairs he came upon an intriguing sight.

Emerging from the basement's clutter of boxes and crates was house-detective Chesterfield Wurzel, who clutched to him with one hand a frantically clinging Kitty-cat Ash Can, while in the other reposed the cannon that should have been mounted on wheels. Assisting in the emergence scene was a thin, venerable person of Chinese heritage—Cook He Gow himself; and from his lips was pouring a rhapsodical flood of praise.

BUT Master Wurzel was taking the affair in a correct professional light.

"Said I'd find the cat, and I did. Kept hearin' him yowl somewhere up in the attic, and I finally shoved open a trick door, and just as I come upon Ash Can, I began fallin', and the gun it begun going off. Then we got to the bottom. 'At's all.' The narrator paused to rub a head, a shoulder and a hip. He patted a pocket. "'At's a pretty good

flashlight I got, too. It didn't bust at all, and I turned it on to find out where I was at."

At this point the owner of Du Port house felt that it was time to ask a question. "And where was that?"

"In a doggone brick room filled with old sardine cans. But I hauled the door open and got out."

"Oh, just sardine cans. Well, well, that's good. And you left the door open, I suppose."

Cook, counselor and commandant He Gow left off rhapsodizing. He caught the Binns eye.

"I close um. Everything all right. Now you boy come along get beefsteak, pork-chop, anything you want."

"So glad that everything's so casually all right," said Frederick Binns. "So reassuring. . . . Ah, I thought so!"

AT the top of the basement stairs were jammed innumerable Mime Minglers, happily wag-tongued and expectant.

"So sorry to have alarmed you," greeted Frederick Binns. "Just this boy tripping and shooting off a gun loaded with harmless blanks. Yes, yes, I got my eye blackened getting there. So sorry."

Slowly, by repetition and shoving, the kitchen was cleared.

Reluctantly did the Minglers return to reception-room and the subject of the big and little theater.

"How fortunate," came an intonation from a seated Mrs. Chichester, fixing an eye upon the returning ones, "that our host is one who puts the correct value on things! How easy it would have been for him to have trumped up this affair of a child and a cap pistol into something of seeming moment, so that rattle-brains might rush about seeking to satisfy their craving for cheap excitement." The good lady nodded significantly at those who had leaped up when the Wurzel cannon started giving six of its best. "And now, as I was saying, about Seashore's plans for a bigger Celebration next year—"

"And for God's sake, keep right side up after this," said Frederick Binns to Chesterfield Wurzel.

Once more in the front hall he began to ladle two punch-glasses full.

"False!" cried a voice.

He turned, to find himself confronted by an accusing Indian maiden: Miss Lotus Givens.

"False!" repeated Miss Givens, forefinger outstretched. "I have just learned

that you are not what you pretend to be. You are not a delivery-boy. You are not a poor man. You are the owner of this rookery. You are out of my life. Henceforth our paths shall not cross!" Miss Givens folded her arms.

Frederick Alonzo Binns suppressed a desire to cheer. When a man has been acting a part, if he is wise he will continue to act it. Momentarily he lowered his head, then raised it.

"It were better thus," he said slowly. "But before you go, might I ask as a final boon; just who is it that has ripped aside the veil?"

"You may. He is Ogilvy Thomas, the new delivery-boy for Mr. Jones. A perfect gentleman, and a truth-teller. You are forgotten!"

The Indian maiden vanished.

FOR the third time Frederick Binns picked up the glasses of punch, but after he had traversed the two reception-rooms, without finding Mary Webster, it jabberingly came upon him that everything might indeed be over in a way that he had not dreamed; that Mary Webster was no longer in the house—that Mary Webster had gone.

Punch spilled in his hands; he began to pad about, peering—to pad faster, to search more wildly.

Nowhere was she to be seen.

He flung out from the house and across the porch. He ran about among parked machines. Along the elliptical drive he pounded, and reached the road, with his heart like a lump of lead, extra size.

Then he saw her. She was at the wheel of a car—the Webster car; and it was pulling away from the side of the road. By a desperate effort he got into the road in time to jump into the glare of the lights.

"Hey!" he yelled.

The car stopped—stopped until the one at the wheel saw who it was that was barring the way; then it started again.

"Get out of the way!" rose her voice. "Get out of the way, or I'll run you down!" The voice was high, taut, on the verge of tears.

"I won't get out of the way!"

The front bumper shoved against the Binns legs.

"Run over me if you want to, but I won't get out of the way."

The bumper shoved, buckled the Binns legs, stopped shoving. The man in the road exchanged the season's best grimaces with the girl in the car.

"Now," said Frederick Binns, easing his legs, "I can tell you a few things. Your father's all right."

"Lots I care about him!" The voice went up a note.

"And Morley, I guess he's all right too."

"Ha! Morley!" The voice went up two notes.

"And I'm—I'm all right."

"You!" The voice had now perilously reached a breaking-point.

"Yes, me, even though I have got a black eye and a lot of other things. Now you listen to me." The young man in the road swung out from in front of the car and ranged alongside it. "I've been looking for you, as well as I could look, with only one eye, and—"

The person in the driver's seat now apparently saw Frederick Binns in entirety for the first time. She gasped—it was a splendidly bunged eye; but she was not the sort who capitulated all at once.

"You've been fighting!" Solicitude was tempered with accusal.

"Yeah, and what if I have? Now, I'm trying to tell you. Your father's all right, and I guess Morley's all right, so you needn't try to go after them."

"Go after them! So they did leave!" Miss Webster's voice touched the apogee of scorn. "Parked me in a corner, and said they'd be right back and—and you yourself, for that matter!" A rankling sense of injustice from all men seemed to pervade the young lady. "A fine host you are. Go and disappear as soon as I come, and—and get to fighting. I'm going!"

Frederick Binns snorted.

"Got to fighting, yeah! Well, that's O. K. with me. Go ahead and go. They won't catch 'em, anyway, not with those three big hams aboard, so there's no danger of your father getting shot; and what with Morley thinking only of his new car—"

"SHOT?" Mary Webster's voice had suddenly gone very small. She began to make fluttering sounds. Apparently it had just begun to dawn upon her that F. Alonzo Binns had been tryin to tell her something of importance. "Father—shot?"

"No danger at all. Not with three cops that size acting as shields."

"Cops?"

"Sure, chasing the opium-runners."

"Opium-runners?"

"Landed in the cove, and they and I fought, and— Say, for the last hour I've been trying to tell you—"

Mary Webster came down out of her car. Came down out of it and seized Frederick Binns by the arms, and to the best of her ability began to shake him. The while, she gave small gasping sobs, a sob to a shake; and as she shook him and wept, she told him what she thought.

"You big ninny! . . . You blind rhinoceros! You—everything! I suppose you think you've been smart, telling me it only in bits, and that all backward. You—*oh!*" She strove to control her sobs. "You get into this car where we can sit down, and you tell me everything." The sobs broke out afresh as memory came welling up. "I suppose you think you're smart, having all of the fun and excitement for a whole week, while I—while I—*oh*, you rhinoceros!"

THE rhinoceros got into the car beside her, and since it seemed necessary, and since she made no objection, put his arm about her.

"I've been trying to tell you," he said. "But maybe—maybe you don't want to hear about it, anyway. You told me up in the city that you didn't like such things, and that if I ever got into one again, you were all through with me; and I got into one again, and you *were* all through with me. So now—"

"Oh, go *ahead!*" said Mary Webster.

"All right, then: Do you want me to begin where I was supposed to have lost money in stocks so that I could get the delivery-boy job, or way back at being shot at by Harley Gann, or just tonight when He Gow first came upon the sixteen suitcases of opium?"

"Oh, begin!"

Frederick Binns began. But he had no more than begun when he broke off.

"I was just wondering," he remarked musingly, "what our good friends Harley and the Cap are going to say, whenever they get to wherever they're going, or maybe even before then, and find that they've been driving Morley's car so fast just with sixteen suitcases filled with bricks. Not but what they're good bricks, mind you—hand-picked bricks; but I don't think that they'll be able to peddle them as the genuine juice of the poppy. You know, knocking at the door of some dive and saying: 'Now, gents, we've got some of the swellest hop today—'"

"Frederick Alonzo Binns!"

"Yes'm," agreed Frederick Alonzo. "Right from the beginning, this time." And right from the beginning it was.

WHEN the teller of tales had finished, there fell a long silence.

"Well?" he said at length, and it was the question of one who asks his fate.

The girl stirred slightly, and put a hand in his.

"I'm afraid there's no chance now," said Mary.

"I knew it!" said Frederick Alonzo Binns dully.

"No chance now," repeated Mary, and put the other hand in his. She shook her head. "No matter what you do from now on, Father will think you're the most wonderful man in the world. Morning, noon and night he'll be after me with, 'Why don't you marry Frederick Binns?'" She looked up at him. "No, Frederick, no chance now."

Frederick Binns took dizzying breath and enfolded her; and from out of the roadside darkness there sounded fierce command.

"Cut out that neckin'!"

The profanity of Frederick Binns and the squeals of Mary Webster equaled any that had come from the fastness of the upper hall.

From the roadside came babbling contrition.

"Oh, my gosh! Oh, my good gosh! I didn't know it was you! They—I—I run 'em all out from upstairs, and I just thought—gosh, I wouldn't have—if I'd known it was you I wouldn't have—"

"Perfectly all right," assured Frederick Binns. "You're to be commended, Chesterfield, for doing your duty. But now that you have done it, if you'll just slip in and tell He Gow to get two suppers ready, we'll be more than obliged to you. All of a sudden I find I'm awfully hungry. We'll be in in about fifteen minutes."

"Sure," said Chesterfield.

"Hey, wait a minute," cried Frederick Binns. "You might as well tell him this, too, so that he can get used to it: Beginning next week he's going to have two permanent boarders." He turned to his seat companion. "Is that right? Two permanent boarders? Permanent?"

"I'd like to see either one of them try to be otherwise!" said Mary Webster.

"That's right, Chesterfield," called Frederick Binns. "It's two permanent boarders!"

THE END.



Long Live

A brief drama in which Napoleon's success is explained.

THE British occupied the crest of the mountain of Alcoba, between the Convent at Busaco and the ravine, and dominated the French camp. The position appeared impregnable; but it must be attacked. On September 27th, Marshal Ney gave the order, and the onslaught was launched, with the blare of trumpets and the roll of drums.

The enemy's vantage-point seemed the key to the mountains, and reared high in the sky, surrounded by precipices. At the end of an hour, so that one wondered what gigantic wings had carried these four thousand men so far, the Marshal of the Empire appeared before the British with two regiments of Grenadiers.

At twenty paces the cannon flamed, and canister ripped into the French columns. Breathless, eager, Ney's troopers vanished into the smoke, rushing, falling, to rise again, until they reached the British bayonets.

During the advance, three hundred men had died. Five hundred fell during the engagement, hand to hand. They went down in clusters; but behind them other Grenadiers arrived. At last the cannon were silent; the British line quivered; gunners and infantrymen fled.

"After them!" Ney shouted.

The pursuit started across the plateau. But—the earth quaked suddenly, a wide area of soil split, and a grim mass of men, one thousand British and four hundred Frenchmen, slid into an unexplored abyss. The surviving combatants heard a fearful clamor, a fugitive, whistling lamentation already far remote. . . . Then nothing was heard save the echo of a dull rumbling.

The remaining troops of each side retreated, mute with horror. . . .

At three in the afternoon an envoy of the British came from Alcoba, asked for Ney's residence, and informed the Marshal that Wellington wished to confer with him concerning that morning's catastrophe. Since the combat Ney had sat as if in a stupor. His servant, stationed before his tent, had allowed none to enter. But now Ney rose and

summoned the commander of the Second Corps.

"Reynier, you're coming with me. Take a captain and a company."

The General bowed, and the small troop climbed up the mountain. . . .

Wellington was waiting, still pale, with a group of officers.

"Monsieur the Marshal," he said, "you must be as interested in the lives of the brave people who fell in the abyss of Alcoba this morning, as I am. Just at present there are no enemies, simply unfortunate people."

Ney stepped forward, and the two leaders shook hands.

"We must help them immediately—"

"We should have started earlier," the Marshal said, "but emotion froze my thoughts. It was the first time in my life that I felt fear."

The generals and their escorts halted on the brink of the immense pit. It was a funnel of rocks, of which the sun burned the edge, which opened the surface of the plateau like a giant yawn, digging into the mountain, driving straight into the earth to dark depths. From this gaping maw rushed a gust of icy wind.

"Some one must go down," Ney stated.

Wellington shuddered, nodded. The French marshal turned to his men:

"Ropes! Captain, have you a *man*?"

"Yes, Marshal."

"Call him."

The captain simply looked at his company. A Grenadier stepped forward.

"He'll do his best," the captain said, presenting him: "He's a Basque."

The Grenadier took off his coat, fastened a rope around his waist. He saluted his captain, grimaced wryly, and was off. For a moment he was seen going down the incline, a stout stick clutched in his fist. But very soon he vanished into darkness.

"All right?" a shout inquired.

"Yes. Let go more rope."

Wellington suggested that one of his Highlanders should go also. But Ney shook his head.

the Emperor!

By GEORGES
D'ESPARBES



Illustrated by Margery Stocking

"No. Your Scotchman might clash with my soldier on the way. Our two men would fight at the end of their ropes; and instead of information, we'd haul up two corpses."

The British leader nodded.

The rope went slack. "Trees, rocks, are stopping him," an officer suggested.

The rope stiffened, and a voice, already distant, came from the abyss: "I can't see a thing. Let go some more—"

A mysterious quiver agitated the rope, held by four men, who released it a few inches at a time. It was slow work. The man below no doubt had to grope, in impenetrable obscurity.

"Houp—eh!" the Grenadiers shouted to encourage their comrade.

Lower and lower, as if flattened out and thinned by the echo, a voice rose from the pit: "Let go—some—more!"

Wellington shrugged impatiently.

"Where's the monk?"

A major brought a monk, who had been waiting behind the grouped soldiers.

"Monsieur the Marshal," said Wellington, "this monk might tell us if there is an issue on the flank of the mountain through which we could save our men more rapidly. He was picked up this morning."

"Question him," Ney agreed.

"You are from this region; you must know the Alcoba?"

The monk peered at the commander with hollow eyes: "Yes."

At this moment the soldiers holding the rope felt no weight at the end of the hemp.

"Houp! Ho—ooo!" voices hailed.

There was a long silence; then a thin thread of voice reached their straining ears, barely understandable.

"Let go—some—more—"

Wellington resumed:

"Father, an accident has happened. This morning, four thousand men were fighting here. Suddenly the earth yielded, and a crowd of them was precipitated into the abyss—"

"Four hundred of mine," Ney said.

"And a thousand of ours," Wellington

added. "Is there a way to find them, to save even a few?"

With one movement the two leaders had lifted their heads, as if they had wished to obtain, each for his own men, an affirmative answer from the monk. But the monk had knelt, and was praying already, his head between his hands, his eyes upon the precipice.

"Must be over with," murmured an officer.

Ney shrugged and signaled his men. Fifty voices hailed: "Hooo! Be-low!"

Four hundred meters of rope had been paid out, and there were but a few yards more. All listened, and at the end of a long moment of suspense, words floated to the brink:

"Hearing—men's voices—but far—far . . . A cry—same cry—always. . . . Lower—the—rope—"

The last yards were let out, and the end was fastened to a strong stake. No one spoke, as if all throats were parched. Again the voice came:

"Can't—go—farther. . . . Still—ear—cry. . . . It is—"

A GUST of wind cut the voice. What he shouted was lost in space, in a gigantic, inarticulate breath, the voice of shadow, of chaos, of emptiness. Ney leaned over and shouted:

"Grenadier! What do you hear?"

And a hundred voices repeated thunderously:

"WHAT DO YOU HEAR?"

The formidable clamor plunged into the precipice. It was flung from wall to wall; rocks caught it as it passed, distorted it, hurled it farther down.

The answer about to lift from the abyss would be the answer of eternity. And doubtless the man suspended so far below heard; for his spectral voice, as if frozen by distance, so far that it had lost all accent and inflection, relayed from the bottom of the abyss these four words: "I hear them cry—"

"What?"

Tenuous, ghostly, the reply came:

"Vive l'Empereur!"



HELL

A lively novelette of the cattle country when an oil boom struck it—by the author of "Six Bombs" and "Three Who Would Hang."

THE rhythmic beat of flying hoofs on the sod broke the cool stillness of the Texas dawn. A big roan horse came into view over the top of a low hill and headed for the buildings and corrals of the Triangle G ranch. The rider of the animal, a youth of twenty years, rocked drunkenly in the saddle. His left leg hung limp,—the foot was out of the stirrup,—and the leg of his corduroy trousers was stained with blood. Blood also darkened the side and right sleeve of the young rider's gray shirt. He clung tightly to the saddle-horn with both hands while he fought to keep his seat.

Unguided, the racing horse seemed purposely to pick the easiest going—as if he knew the man upon his back was badly hurt. The splendid beast stretched his beautiful body to its utmost with each stride, the long clean legs devouring distance avidly.

"Good fellow, Robin," muttered the wounded youth as the ranch buildings came into view. "Go like hell. I'm getting dizzy." He lurched forward, and his right hand slipped from the saddle-horn to catch a new hold in the horse's flying mane.

On the wide veranda of the ranch-house, Ted Gaffney stood watching the approach of the racing animal. As far as he could see that easy, swinging gait, Ted could recognize Robin, the favorite mount of his younger brother Cliff. Then the keen eyes of the watcher caught sight of the rider and saw in an instant that something was wrong. Even before seeing the manner in which Cliff was managing to stay in the saddle, Ted had been wondering why his brother was coming in so early and in such haste. Cliff had

been riding night herd on that portion of the ranch known as the "south range."

His lean, brown face suddenly grave, Ted Gaffney vaulted the veranda railing and ran to meet the coming animal. A man carrying a saddle emerged from one of the sheds and started toward the corrals. Ted saw him and as he ran, he called for the man to follow. The man—Pete Dawson, veteran foreman of the Triangle G—dropped the saddle and obeyed as fast as his high-heeled boots would allow.

Two hundred yards from the house the roan came to a surprisingly gentle halt, his quivering nostrils within a few inches of Ted Gaffney's shoulder.

"What's the matter, kid?" cried Ted, as his brother tumbled from the saddle into his arms. "What happened?"

"Damned meat-thieves from that Hell Town over on Sour Creek planted some lead in me," answered the youngster, twisting his tight lips in a game smile. "But I'm not badly hurt. There were six of them. They came in a big truck. Shot three yearlings out of that herd in Crooked Cañon. I was over on Buzard Ridge when I heard the shots. I forked Robin and high-tailed it over to see what the rumpus was—rode up on them just as they were loading the second carcass into the truck. It was just breaking daylight. I opened up on them with my six-gun, but I guess I got excited—started shooting before I was within range. They came right back at me with rifles. I got my rifle out of the boot and managed to blow the two near tires on the truck, before they nicked me. Then I headed Robin for home. Help me to bed—and get after those *hombres!* They are about four miles from here, at the head of the cañon. Go in the car and you can get there before they can get their damned truck ready to move."

TOWN

By SEVEN ANDERTON

Illustrated by E. H. Kuhlhoff



While Cliff spoke, Ted had been supporting him with a long sinewy arm.

"The car is taking you to Doctor Crosby," declared Ted. Then he turned his head and spoke to Pete Dawson, who had arrived in time to hear Cliff's story. "Roll out the boys, Pete," he ordered crisply. "Never mind breakfast! Fan out for the cañon and get those polecats. Take care of Robin. I'm heading for Prairie Junction with the kid."

Without a word, the foreman swung his wiry body into the roan's saddle and was off in the direction of the bunk-house. Since the death of the boys' father some two years past, young Cliff was not only half owner of the Triangle G, but the idol of the outfit as well. Pete Dawson knew as he hastened to rout out the crew that not only would they willingly give up their breakfasts, but their lives, if need be, to avenge any harm done to Cliff.

"Listen, you big stiff," protested Cliff as the foreman rode away, "I'm not badly hurt—just lost some blood. Get me to bed; old Soap-in-the-soup can fix me up fine. You take the car and go after those Hell Town ladrones. Show them that nobody can get away with rustling Triangle G beef, dead or alive."

Ted's arm tightened about the wounded lad.

"I don't *want* to knock you cold," declared the elder brother, the moisture in his eyes giving the lie to the gruffness of his voice, "but I will if I have to! You're going to Doc Crosby as soon as I can get you in shape to ride. You're still bleeding."

Easily and tenderly the tall wiry Ted lifted Cliff in his arms and started with long strides toward the ranch-house. The youngster ceased to protest. Triangle G riders were pouring from the bunk-house and heading for the harness-shed at the

double-quick, finishing their dressing as they went.

At the foot of the veranda steps Ted Gaffney halted and called to the foreman: "Pete, tell Joe to bring hot water and a flock of clean towels—*pronto*."

Before Ted had the wounded lad undressed, the outfit's Indian cook—who liked to be called Joe, but was usually called by the crew "Soap-in-the-soup,"—due to a long-ago culinary accident,—came into the bedroom with a pail of steaming water and the towels.

"Who do?" inquired the red man, as Ted stretched Cliff on the bed.

"Beef-thieves from Hell Town," answered Ted crisply. "Give me one of those towels. Then wet another and have it ready."

The cook obeyed, and for the next few minutes there was silence except for a couple of moans from the wounded youth as Ted worked. Then the muffled thunder of many hoofs sounded as the Triangle G riders swung past the house and headed south.

"Boys get um?" inquired the Indian.

There was a grunt from Ted Gaffney which managed somehow to be an affirmative answer, as he took the third wet towel from the cook's hands.

Ten minutes later Cliff was carried from the house and made as comfortable as possible in the big car which was the Triangle G's most speedy transportation. Ted slid behind the wheel and the auto sped away in a northwesterly direction, headed for Prairie Junction, fourteen miles distant.

BELTS tightened about empty stomachs, grim purpose on their leather-brown faces and their best horseflesh

beneath them, twelve men, led by Pete Dawson, rode southward toward the head of Crooked Cañon. Each rifle-boot held its useful weapon, and a revolver swung at the thigh of each rider. No words were spoken; the cavalcade was too intent upon its purpose for speech.

In less than ten minutes after leaving the Triangle G corrals, twelve sweating horses thundered over the rim of the cañon and went plunging in a swirl of dust down the steep slope toward its broad and heavily grassed floor, where a small herd of young stuff had been grazing since early spring. A wild yell went up in chorus from a dozen throats. On the level green cañon floor, about a quarter-mile away, six men were working frantically around a huge truck, in the rear end of which lay three slaughtered yearlings bearing the Triangle G brand.

The beef-thieves were caught! Reins dropped onto the necks of the horses and eager hands began to drag rifles from their boots. The dozen sweating mounts reached the bottom of the slope and raced down the cañon floor toward the culprits. The men about the disabled and loot-laden truck had seen their danger; they abandoned their labor over the tires that had been pierced by the lead from Cliff Gaffney's rifle; and hurrying to the front of the truck, clustered about some object on the ground.

Rifles ready, the Triangle G outfit thundered down the cañon, bent upon avenging their idol and upholding the tradition that it was impossible to rustle Triangle G beef, and go unpunished.



Then an ominous sound suddenly mingled with the tattoo of flying hoofs—the wicked sputter of a machine-gun echoed back from the cañon walls! Lying flat on the ground behind the snarling weapon, the gunner sprayed leaden death into the swiftly approaching cavalcade.

Still beyond effective rifle-range, the Triangle G riders met that hail of hissing lead. The gunner was shooting low. Four horses went down, spilling their riders. One of the slugs found Curly Foster's heart as he fell, and he never knew that his dying horse rolled completely over him.

Mercilessly the renegade behind the machine-gun moved its nozzle back and forth. In less than a minute a dozen of the best mounts in the Triangle G cavvy were dead or dying on the floor of the cañon. Behind their carcasses lay two wounded and nine uninjured men, heeding Pete Dawson's warning to keep down in the shelter of the dead animals until that deadly weapon in front of the truck should cease to spray them with its withering fire. As the riders fell or leaped to safety, three rifles had been lost. The nine uninjured waddies now held the others and waited grimly for a chance to try their marksmanship, with the beef-thieves as targets.

Suddenly the snarling gun fell silent. Pete Dawson placed his hat on the barrel of his six-gun and lifted it above the body of the horse behind which he lay. There was an immediate burst from the machine-gun, and lead thudded into and whistled above the foreman's bulwark of horseflesh.

"Smart *hombres!*" growled the gaunt foreman. Bareheaded, he moved to the shoulders of the dead animal and peered cautiously over its neck. "Too far away to be picked off, even with our rifles," he reported to the others. "Looks like we've got ourselves into a hell of a mess."

IT did look that way. The floor and sloping walls of the cañon were bare of shelter other than the bodies of the slain horses. Some seven hundred yards lay between the thieves' truck and the thwarted men of the Triangle G. As Pete Dawson had declared, rifles could not be effective against the machine-gun at that distance. The cowboys were helpless in their shelter—and it was suicide to try to leave it.

The renegades evidently realized the situation as well as did their victims. While the gunner remained at his post,

The cowboys, on foot, could not hope to overtake the truck. Then the picture suddenly changed: the sharp crack of a rifle sounded through the cañon and the machine-gunner in the rear of the truck dropped his weapon.



the other five returned to the task of repairing and replacing tires. Sam Croft, boiling with anger, suddenly popped up from behind his carcass shelter, snapped his rifle to his shoulder, and took a pot-shot at the five men working about the truck's rear wheel. He got no result except another burst from the enemy weapon which dropped him behind his horse with a left arm that he would not use again for weeks.

"All you damned fools stay down," barked Pete Dawson. "That varmint knows how to shoot that eight-day gun. It's our turn to wait—and that's all there is to it. Only smart thing we can do is stay able to make our move when the time comes."

With Sam Croft for an object lesson, the other men refrained from quarreling with the foreman's order. They lay fuming but helpless behind their cover, while nearly half an hour passed. Then the roar of the big truck's powerful motor sounded through the cañon and Pete Dawson, peering again over his horse, reported that the truck, with the machine-gunner and his weapon in the rear end, was moving away down the cañon.

The cowboys, on foot, were helpless—they could not hope to overtake even the lumbering truck. The beef-thieves were getting away with it! Some six miles to the south the cañon opened into the level valley of Sour Creek. Four miles beyond that point, the renegades would be in the haven of Hell Town.

Those of the Triangle G waddies who were able, stood up to watch the tri-

umphant enemy depart. They stood cursing, their rifles in their hands.

Then another factor unexpectedly entered the situation; the picture suddenly changed. The sharp crack of a rifle sounded through the cañon and the machine-gunner in the rear of the truck dropped his weapon and pitched backward, as dead as the two slaughtered steers between which his body sank. Again the rifle spoke—and the heavy truck lurched as a front tire exploded.

"Soap-in-the-soup!" exclaimed Pecos Tom Dingman.

"Jumping sidewinders!" cried Mush Hogan joyfully. "We've got 'em now!"

Every one of the Triangle G riders had recognized the voice of that rifle a moment after it had spoken the first time. It was a United States army rifle, the only one owned within many miles—and the property of the Indian cook. The red man had in some manner managed to bring the beloved weapon home with him after being discharged at the end of the World War. He could shoot the head from a rattler with it as far as he could see the reptile—and he had remarkable vision.

"I can't see the copper-colored shoot-in' fool," shouted Pete Dawson as he leaped over the body of the horse he had recently bestrode, "but wherever he is,

I know some beef-stealin' *hombres* who will soon be wishin' he was a damned site farther away! Come on, you buckaroos—let's close in. We'll come back for the fellers that are hurt."

THE rifle in the hands of the unseen cook spat again, and the wavering truck came to a stop as a rear tire went flat. With shouts of joy the uninjured men of the Triangle G raced over the ground toward their disabled prey.

"There's the red son-of-a-gun!" cried Pete Dawson, when the running 'punchers had covered something more than a hundred yards. "He's up there on the east rim of the cañon. Follow me—we'll climb the west side and go along the top. That way we'll have them from both sides."

As they started the climb up the steep slope at the foreman's heels, the army rifle barked again. A renegade who had slipped back along the shelter of the truck darted around the rear and made a grab for the machine-gun. He never reached it; his body swayed for a moment and then wilted to the ground.

Swiftly the eight 'punchers scrambled up the slope and made their way to a point on the cañon's western rim which placed the vehicle directly between them and the old redskin, whom they could now see plainly. As they gained this position they saw a white handkerchief on the end of a rifle-barrel, thrust from the truck's cab and waved violently.

"All right, you lizards," bellowed Pete Dawson through his cupped hands, "pile out and walk away from the truck with your paws in the air. Move *pronto!*"

Three men climbed out of the vehicle's cab and obeyed the foreman's order. The 'punchers could see the bodies of the man on the ground behind the truck and the one between the carcasses of the steers. The sixth bandit was not to be seen.

"Where's the other coyote?" shouted Pete Dawson.

"I got um," came the voice of Indian Joe across the cañon before any of the renegades could answer.

It was true; the driver had slid down beneath the wheel with a clean hole through his head where one of the cook's steel-jacketed missiles had passed. When the captors had scrambled down the slope again and taken charge of their prisoners, they were joined by Indian Joe. He explained that he had saddled a horse and followed the rest of the

outfit as soon as he saw Ted and Cliff on their way to the doctor.

"Where's the horse?" demanded Pete Dawson.

"Up top," answered the cook, jerking a copper thumb toward where he had lain while picking off the three thieves.

"You get back up there and fork him again," ordered the foreman. "Scoot home like the Great Spirit was reaching for your shirt-tail, and come back to the head of the cañon with the buckboard as fast as you can make it. Curly Foster is dead, and three other boys are hurt. We'll be waiting for you up on the flat. Make tracks!"

During the hour's wait before the buckboard arrived, the able men of the outfit carried Curly's body to the top of the cañon slope and assisted the wounded men there after administering such first aid as they could. The bodies of the three dead renegades were left where they lay, to be reported to the sheriff in Prairie Junction. The prisoners were herded to the cañon rim and corralled by two of the crew. They were sullen and silent, making no answer to the few questions put to them by Pete Dawson.

"Suppose I pistol-whip these skunks a little bit," suggested Mush Hogan eagerly. "I can mebbly loosen up their talkers a little."

"Let 'em alone," snapped Dawson. "We'll just take 'em in and let Ted handle 'em when he gets back from the Junction."

"Here comes old Soap-in-the-soup with the buckboard," announced Slim Barnes.

AT just about the time the buckboard with its capacity load of captors, captives, dead and wounded started its trek back to the ranch-house, a certain individual in Hell Town was beginning to wonder why six of his hirelings had not returned with the truckload of beef for which they had been sent. And presently the individual who was beginning to wonder,—he was known by the name of "Husky Al" Davis,—sent two more henchmen in a powerful and speedy car to ascertain the cause of the delay. Husky Al was mayor of Hell Town by virtue of a mandate issued by himself and disputed by but few, all of whom had become deceased within a short time after voicing their objection.

Less than three months had passed since the place now known as Hell Town, on Sour Creek, had been a comparative-



ly peaceful little cow-town known as Cottonwood Bend. Then a wildcat oil-well being sunk less than a mile from the tiny trading center came in with a vim beyond the wildest dreams of its backers, and began to spew into the air more than twenty thousand dollars' worth of "black gold" every twenty-four hours.

A week after the wildcat well "blew," Cottonwood Bend had vanished—smothered by more than forty thousand seekers after big wages and sudden wealth. The dazed natives watched while frenzied hordes poured in by train, truck, auto, horseback and even on foot. The mushroom city spread itself over several hundred acres; the heterogeneous traffic congested the trail from Prairie Junction, thirty miles to the northwest. For the first time in history more than two trains in one day stopped at the weather-beaten little depot which still flaunted the name *Cottonwood Bend* in the face of the crazy community that was fast earning its new name of "Hell Town."

Hard on the heels of the workers and developers came the parasites: Nimble-fingered gamblers. Panhandlers. Sleek gentlemen who called themselves promoters. Falsely jolly gentlemen who immediately opened speak-easies or began to sell liquor by the bottle from the automobiles in which it had been transported from the border. Hard-eyed individuals who meant to get a portion of the sud-

den wealth in any possible way—but get it in spite of hell and high water. Riff raff—mill-tailings of hell. And so Cottonwood Bend became a more than half-mad community of sudden fortunes—and sudden death.

HELL TOWN was a fortnight old and its original name was passing to the realm of forgotten things, when five men arrived from the north in a dust-covered and travel-marked sixteen-cylinder car. They were typical big city gunmen—gorillas of the type bred by gangland. Because of a certain factional argument, these five had thought it best to depart from a certain Eastern metropolis for a time. On their westward journey they had heard of the oil strike on Sour Creek and promptly headed their car in that direction. The leader of the quintet was "Husky Al" Davis. Two hours after arriving in the boom town, Husky Al had decided to make his four fellow-hoodlums the nucleus of a mob, and establish himself as the big shot of Hell Town. And before that decision was three hours old, Husky Al met one Panther Sam.

Panther Sam was a border-bred desperado whose surname was Collins. He was leader of the Collins gang, numbering sixteen villains worthy of a chief who had escaped so many well-deserved hangings that the tally had been lost. Panther Sam and his assorted lot of cutthroats had committed all the catalogued crimes and invented a number of new ones in their spare time.



Despite the wide difference in garb, speech and environment, outlaw and gangster knew each other for kindred spirits at first glance. There was nothing in the plans soon being discussed by Husky Al and Panther Sam that was calculated to subtract from the already lurid reputation of Hell Town. Having combined forces and recruited more followers from the plentiful supply available, the precious pair lost no time in launching their campaign.

They started with the most logical thing—liquor. Within a week three bars were monopolizing all the traffic in fire-water. Due to the efficient activities of Panther Sam and his crew, no liquor except that bound for the trio of gin mills watched over by Husky Al had any luck arriving within twenty miles of Cottonwood Bend. Naturally the price of hooch went up, once the monopoly was firmly established.

Husky Al then left the booze racket in the hands of lieutenants, and turned his peculiar talents to other fields. The business of organizing gambling was somewhat more difficult. But Husky Al was equal to the job. There were a number of proprietors of gaming-places who objected to joining the Davis "organization," but when a half dozen of the objectors had become the late proprietors of their houses of chance, and the rest had become docile, there remained but little more to do. And after some two score of "private" games had been held up by masked men who left the players destitute, the private games folded up and those who would flirt with Dame Chance patronized those places where Husky Al collected the rake-off.

Next came the restaurants. That was easy; thousands of hungry men were soon paying ten to fifteen percent more for the food they consumed—and that percent went into the coffers of Husky Al's mob.

At this point in their affairs, Panther Sam had an idea which he promptly laid before his burly partner. Husky Al listened to the idea, pondered it briefly, and found it good. Briefly, Panther Sam's idea was this: The restaurants under control of the mob used tons of beef daily—and beef cost money. Why not increase the revenue from the restaurants by ceasing to spend money for beef? Was not the rolling range land for miles in every direction covered with grazing herds? What could be more simple? A truck or two, a dozen men to locate a herd bedded down for the night and—beef without cost, for the restaurants! Or, to be strictly accurate, beef for which the restaurants would pay the mob, instead of the rightful owners.

The scheme sounded good to Husky Al and he instructed Sam to go ahead and carry out the plan. It was true that herds of beef roamed the plains in every direction—but the third butcher crew sent out by Panther Sam picked the wrong direction and invaded the range of the Triangle G. Which was the reason for Husky Al wondering why they did not come back with the beef.

Just before noon the two gunmen who had been dispatched to investigate the matter returned with their report of what they had found near the head of Crooked Cañon. With the aid of Panther Sam, Hell Town's big shot put the picture together. His happiness, however was not increased. He vowed vengeance on the bunch of cow-nurses responsible and began laying plans therefor. But those plans were never to be carried out.

IT was noon when Ted Gaffney and his wounded brother returned to the ranch-house, with the latter's injuries dressed by Doctor Crosby and pronounced not serious. When Cliff had been put to bed, Ted listened to the story Pete Dawson told him in short and lurid words. Ted's face hardened while he listened, and a bleak look came into his gray eyes. In wintry silence he followed the foreman to where the three captives lay bound on the floor of a stout box stall.

The renegades were still defiant. They maintained a sullen silence when questioned by Ted. Several of the outfit had followed to the stall and stood grouped in the open door. Through this group Indian Joe pushed his way and touched Ted's arm.

"Joe make um talk plenty quick," said the cook in answer to Gaffney's questioning look.

Ted's eyes narrowed and bored into the glassy black ones of the red man. After a moment of study he turned and thrust the Indian ahead of him out of the stall.

"I want them to talk plenty quick," said Gaffney in a low tone when they were some distance from the door, "but I don't want them tortured or killed. What have you got in that bloodthirsty mind of yours?"

"All plenty cowards," averred the cook. "Joe make um talk quick. No hurt."

"Go ahead with whatever it is you have up your sleeve," answered Ted with sudden decision, "but I'm going to watch, and you'll stop when I tell you to—or I'll peel off your red hide."

Something that was almost a grin flitted for a moment over the cook's face and he turned away to hurry toward the cook-shack. Gaffney stood watching him with speculative eyes and with lips set in a thin line. The red man went into the kitchen, and emerged a few moments later dragging a large wooden box by an improvised wire handle. As he approached, Ted heard from within the box a whirring sound that no man forgets or mistakes for any other after once having heard it—the warning whir of an angry rattler. In this case, the sound was a chorus; there were four of the poisonous reptiles in the box—all decidedly angry.

The top of the box, Ted saw, was covered with a small-meshed poultry netting. The reptiles inside were writhing over each other in their excitement and anger.

"Plenty mad," observed the Indian, pausing beside Ted. "Joe catch um hour ago in shale bank over in coulee."

"What d'you intend to do?" inquired Ted.

"Boss ask um talk," replied the cook, jerking a thumb in the direction of the box stall. "No talk—tell um shut door and Joe turn um snakes loose."

"Come on with your rattlers," decided Ted. "We'll try the threat—but don't you pull the cover off that box."

"Maybe do," replied the red man stolidly. "Joe pull um fangs when catch um."

Ted Gaffney smiled, grimly; then he turned and led the way to the stall. Dragging the box, the cook followed his



boss into the stall. Here he tipped the box with its awesome contents onto its side.

"I'm asking you fellows some questions," said Ted, eying the bound men sternly; "if you don't answer them, we'll turn these rattlers out of the box, shut the door and see if human snakes can get along with the other kind. Who is the head of the crooks that run that Hell Town down on the creek, and where can I find him?"

TURN your damned snakes loose," snarled a swarthy ruffian who sat propped against one wall of the stall. "We don't squawk."

"Aw, Ben," came in a husky voice from another captive who lay prone on the littered plank floor, "don't—"

"Shut up," snapped the swarthy hoodlum.

"Boss," spoke up Indian Joe, pointing to the defiant renegade who had been addressed as Ben, "take um others out. Joe let tough guy get first bite. Him die—push 'nother one in."

"All right," said Ted, turning toward the riders who stood in the open doorway. "You fellows carry these other two buzzards out."

The men obeyed and when they laid their burdens on the ground outside the door he moved to the opening himself. The Indian stood stolidly beside the box. In one hand he held a rope which was tied to the wire cover.

"I'll ask you once more—and this is the last time," said Ted Gaffney to the sullen captive. "Will you answer my questions?"

"Go to hell," snarled the gorilla.

"Go outside plenty quick, boss," Joe warned.

There was the sound of nails being torn from wood as the Indian gave a violent jerk on the rope in his hand. The wire cover was ripped away and four



"Miss Knight," said Ted, "may I suggest that you and your girls go outside of town for awhile until things quiet down."

fine specimens of the diamond-back rattler tumbled out onto the littered floor of the stall.

Ted stepped quickly outside, and the cook was but a breath behind him. It was Joe who slammed shut the heavy door.

"Ten minutes finish um tough guy plenty," remarked the redskin as he stood with his back against the door of the stall. "Him next, huh?" A copper finger indicated the pasty-faced thief whom the ruffian named Ben had ordered to hold his tongue.

The crook indicated opened his mouth as if to speak, but no sound came. Then a hoarse cry of stark terror came from within the closed stall.

"Help!" came the cry of the imprisoned gangster. "Come in and keep these damned things away from me! I'll talk! For God's sake, hurry!"

Indian Joe turned and flung open the door with his left hand as he whipped a .45 from its holster at his hip with his right. The six-gun spoke four times rapidly, and four sinuous black bodies were writhing out their lives, with bullet-holes through their flat and ugly

heads. The cook holstered his gun and stepped into the stall, now pungent with the smell of burned cordite. Ted Gaffney was at his shoulder. The others crowded up to the doorway. The renegade had fainted.

"Tough guy pretty much woman," grunted the red man, contempt thick in his voice. Before the others knew what he was about, Joe struck a match and bent over the inert rascal. The flame touched the end of the fellow's nose. The result was all that the Indian could have desired; the hoodlum came to, with a howl of pain. He squirmed for a moment and then lay still, looking up into the Indian's glittering black eyes.

"Talk um straight," warned the belligerent cook. "No do, Joe get plenty more snake quick."

"That's right," said Ted Gaffney. "You'd better tell the truth. You're going to be kept here until we find out whether you have or not. And if we find that you've lied, nobody will interfere with the snakes' fun next time. Who is the boss crook over at Hell Town?"

"Husky Al Davis," croaked the rogue. Sweat was trickling down his face.

"Did he send you to slaughter our beef?"

The gangster nodded.

"Where can I find him?"

"Anywhere," came the answer. "Just ask for him. Everybody knows him."

"I've heard of him," nodded Ted. "I've also heard that he has teamed up with Panther Sam Collins. Is that correct?"

Again the rascal nodded.

"How many men in their gang?"

"I don't know," croaked the miserable wretch, licking his lips. "A lot."

Ted turned toward the men in the door. "Pitch those dead snakes out of here and put those two live ones back," he ordered. "Hogan, you stay here and look after these *hombres*. The rest of us are going to Hell Town."

"Aw, boss—" Mush Hogan began to protest.

"Chop it," Gaffney snapped. "You get into plenty of scraps when there is no reason to. That's why I'm leaving you here. I'm going to start this one myself—and I don't want you around, to go off half-cocked."

Hogan grinned sheepishly but said no more. He was the stormy petrel of the Triangle G outfit, but he knew that Ted in his present mood would stand for no argument.

"Come along, the rest of you fellows," ordered Gaffney as he turned and led the way toward the bunkhouse. Halting before its door, he turned and addressed the eight men who stood before him.

"All of you but Joe," he instructed them, "get ready to leave here in ten minutes. Take six-guns and plenty of ammunition. We are going in the car to Hell Town. You'll all have to crowd in somehow. Joe, you stay here and look after Cliff—and do a good job of it, or you'll be on your way to the happy hunting-grounds as soon as I get back."

Ted turned to the 'punchers. "And before we go, I want to tell you fellows that we are not taking the law into our own hands. While I was in Prairie Junction I telephoned to the Governor. You know that he and father were great friends. I have in my pocket a telegram authorizing me to act as a captain of Rangers. I am now deputizing all of you. We are going to clean up that Hell Town and do the job so that it will stay cleaned. Get ready to start."

Without waiting for a reply, Ted spun on his heel and went to the house to say good-by to Cliff and tell him Indian Joe was being left to take care of him.

IT was past two o'clock in the afternoon when the big car rolled away from the bunk-house, headed south. Besides Ted Gaffney, seven men, armed for battle, were packed into it.

"I'm going to park the car in the edge of town," Ted told his men as the auto sped along the winding trail. "I am then going into town alone, but I want every one of you to keep me in sight and be ready to jump in whenever I start anything. I want no more than two of you to be together at one time—but all of you keep me in sight. And don't any of you start anything of your own accord; this is my party. Just mosey around and look as innocent as you can while you watch me. Have you got that straight?"

The waddies all signified their understanding of the orders. Thereafter the car sped onward with Ted giving all his attention to the wheel and few words being spoken among the others. They were less than four miles from Hell Town when they topped a hill and Ted was forced to apply all his brakes to avoid running down six girls who scattered in panic from the trail. With tires sliding in the sandy dust, the heavily loaded car came to a halt.

"Sorry, ladies," said Ted Gaffney, leaning out. "I should've been watching more sharply."

"So should we," replied a tall, slender young woman. "But since you have stopped, would you mind telling us if this road leads to Prairie Junction?"

"It does," replied Ted, sweeping the six with a glance, "but surely you aren't walking to Prairie Junction. It is nearly thirty miles."

The girl who had previously spoken smiled ruefully.

"There is nothing left for us to do but walk to Prairie Junction," she said. "My name is Stella Knight. For four years I have been making my living by going with these girls whom you see with me, and opening a restaurant in each new oil-field to be discovered. I opened one in Cottonwood Bend—but it seems that gangster tactics have been applied here; and we have been frozen out because we refused to treat with the gangsters."

"Let me see if I get this straight, Miss Knight," said Ted. "You opened a restaurant in this Hell Town. You have been run out of business and out of town by gangsters. Is the name of the old he-crook Husky Al Davis?"

"It is," answered the girl.

"Miss," said Ted, "how long ago did you close your restaurant?"

"A little over an hour ago," replied the girl, after a glance at her wrist-watch. "I was told that if I—and the rest of the girls—did not agree to certain things by tonight, the restaurant would be closed for us."

"I see," nodded Ted. "What is the name of your restaurant?"

"The Southern Star."

"Are these girls your entire staff?"

"They are."

"Then," said Ted, "if you will accept a ride back to town in my car, I promise you that you may reopen your restaurant and that it will not be closed by anyone but yourself—and you will not have to agree to any 'certain things.' I happen to be a captain of the Rangers, and these are my men."

THE girl stood looking at him, her eyes suddenly aglow. Finally—

"You are not—not—kidding?" she asked with a choke in her voice.

For answer Ted took a telegram from his pocket and handed it to her. "It was the Governor's appointment of himself to the post he had told her of. She read

it and handed it back. Her eyes were moist.

"But you have no room," she protested.

"There will be room, directly," Ted declared. He turned his head and addressed his riders. "Pile out, you *hombres!* The ladies need your room—and a four-mile hike will give you an appetite for the grub that will be waiting for you at the Southern Star restaurant when you get to town."

"I got a appetite already," was the only protest, voiced by "Irish" Dugan, as the waddies piled out of the car.

"Well, get another, and eat two meals," grinned Ted Gaffney. "Help the ladies in, you grizzlies."

An hour later seven weary and perspiring punchers flocked into the Southern Star restaurant on the twisting and congested main street of Hell Town. They were quickly seated at a large table, made by pushing three small ones together, and food was placed before them by willing waitresses.

"Now," said Ted Gaffney, when the meal had been thoroughly punished, "I'm going out to look over the lay of the land. You fellows follow the instructions I gave you. We'll be back here before sundown."

The punchers followed their boss from the place, and proceeded to do exactly as he had told them. During the rest of the afternoon Ted wandered about the town in a manner that was apparently aimless, but in reality was far from it. The sun was just above the western horizon when Ted again entered the Southern Star restaurant and seated himself at a table near the center of the dining room. By ones and twos his riders entered and seated themselves at tables in various parts of the place. Ted beckoned Stella Knight from her post behind the cash-register and asked her to have the girls who waited on his boys tell them to take plenty of time with their food and to sit tight until he gave them the word to do otherwise. Stella agreed, and went back to her post.

THE sun sank and twilight began to fall over the town. Besides Ted and his Triangle G riders, there were less than half a dozen customers in the place. It was evident word had been passed that the Southern Star was under the ban of the big-shot, and might at any moment become a very unhealthy place. An air of tenseness developed. The wad-

dies at their tables toyed with their food and from time to time loosened the heavy six-guns in their holsters. The waitresses, while they strove to go about their work as usual, were plainly nervous. They had received certain instructions from Stella Knight as to what they were to do in case anything out of the ordinary happened and none of them had forgotten the instructions.

BACK at the Triangle G ranch-house the sun was still more than an hour high when Indian Joe and Mush Hogan walked into the bedroom where Cliff Gaffney lay reading a magazine. Hogan did the talking. In ten minutes he laid before the younger boss of the Triangle G a plan that had been hatched by himself and the cook during a conference outside the door of the box stall in which the men taken prisoner that morning lay bound and helpless.

When Hogan had finished there was a happy grin on the face of the wounded youngster. He chuckled and snuffed out the stub of his cigarette in a tray at his bedside.

"O. K., fellows," said Cliff. "You carry one of the army cots from the bunk-house out to the box stall, and then help me out there. I've slept most of the afternoon, and I'm as fresh as a daisy. I'll watch over your friends and keep them from getting into mischief. And I'm of a notion you may come in handy to Ted and the boys."

"And you will stick by us if Ted fires us for leaving here?" asked Hogan.

"When Ted is not here, I'm the boss," Cliff asserted.

"You sure are," nodded Hogan.

"Well," continued Cliff, "I am ordering you and Soap-in-the-soup to get to Hell Town and look after Ted and the rest of the boys. Get moving!"

And so, as the sun was sinking close to the western hilltops, Mush Hogan and the redskin cook rode away from the Triangle G corrals and spurred their horses along the dusty trail that led to Hell Town. . . .

Dusk had almost become darkness when Ted and the other Triangle men in the Southern Star saw two men enter the place and stop at the cigar counter beside which Stella Knight tended the cash-register. A covert signal from Stella as she turned to meet the newcomers, told Ted Gaffney that one of them was Husky Al Davis. He surmised correctly that the other was Panther Sam

Collins. Ted picked up the check which a girl had long since placed upon his table and walked leisurely up to where Stella stood talking to the two crooks.

"That's all," Husky Al was saying as Ted came up. "This joint will be closed in thirty minutes from now—or we will close it."

"You'll do what?" inquired Ted, halting close beside the gang chief.

"I wasn't talking to you, Hoosier," sneered Husky Al. "Scram."

"I'm talking to you, just the same, *hombre*," answered Ted calmly. "Miss Knight happens to be a friend of mine. She doesn't care to close her restaurant, and I aim to see that nobody meddles in her business."

"Yeah?" snarled Husky Al. "And who the hell do you think *you* are?"

Ted Gaffney's fist flashed up from the level of his hip and crashed against the gangster's jaw. The blow landed pat on the point of the chin; it closed Husky Al's mouth with a snap and sent him sprawling unconscious on the floor. With the quickness of his namesake, Panther Sam went for the gun at his hip, but the weapon was only half drawn when he found himself looking into the muzzle of Ted's revolver. For a moment the outlaw stood with his mouth agape. Never had he seen anything like the astonishing speed of this young ranchman's draw.

Several of the Triangle G riders had leaped to their feet as they saw Panther Sam's hand flash to the butt of his revolver.

"Sit tight, you fellows!" Ted Gaffney snapped at them over the outlaw's shoulder. "I'll handle this."

HIS waddies dropped back into their chairs, but their hands continued to hover near their guns. With the beginning of trouble, all the girls except Stella Knight had fled to the kitchen. Stella stood wide-eyed behind the cigar counter, a peculiar light in her eyes as they rested on the long lean young man who had declared himself her champion. A moan came from the prostrate Davis, stretched limp on the floor.

"Unbuckle your gun-belt, *hombre*," ordered Ted, his gaze coming back to Panther Sam. "Drop it on the floor, and back away from it."

The outlaw obeyed. As he took several backward steps from the fallen belt and weapon, a man in the greasy dungarees of the oil-field worker entered the

restaurant. As Ted started to turn his head for a look at the newcomer, the fellow snatched an automatic from an armpit holster and covered Ted's back.

"Don't move, guy," growled the latest arrival as he pressed the muzzle of his gun into the small of Ted's back. "And point that rod of yours at the ceiling!"

FURIOUS, but helpless, Ted Gaffney did as the fellow ordered. The Triangle G men at the tables were unable to interfere, for Ted's body was between them and the man whose gun threatened his life. So they sat still and waited.

"Pick up your gun, Sam," said the rough-clad gunman, "and help the chief up. Who is this bird? Shall I bump him?"

"He's the boss of the outfit that wiped out three of our boys this morning," replied Panther Sam, as he retrieved his belt and gun. "Hold your hardware on him until the chief comes out of it, and let him tell you what to do."

Panther Sam turned and bent over the figure of the burly gang chief. A few moments later Husky Al was on his feet, glaring at the young cattleman whose fist had laid him low, as Panther Sam told him who Ted was.

"Shall I bump him, Al?" inquired the gorilla behind Gaffney.

"Not right now," replied the irate racketeer. "We'll take him with us to the joint and find out some things I want to know."

"These *hombres* at the tables are all his friends," spoke up Panther Sam. "They was going to horn in awhile ago, but he told them to keep out."

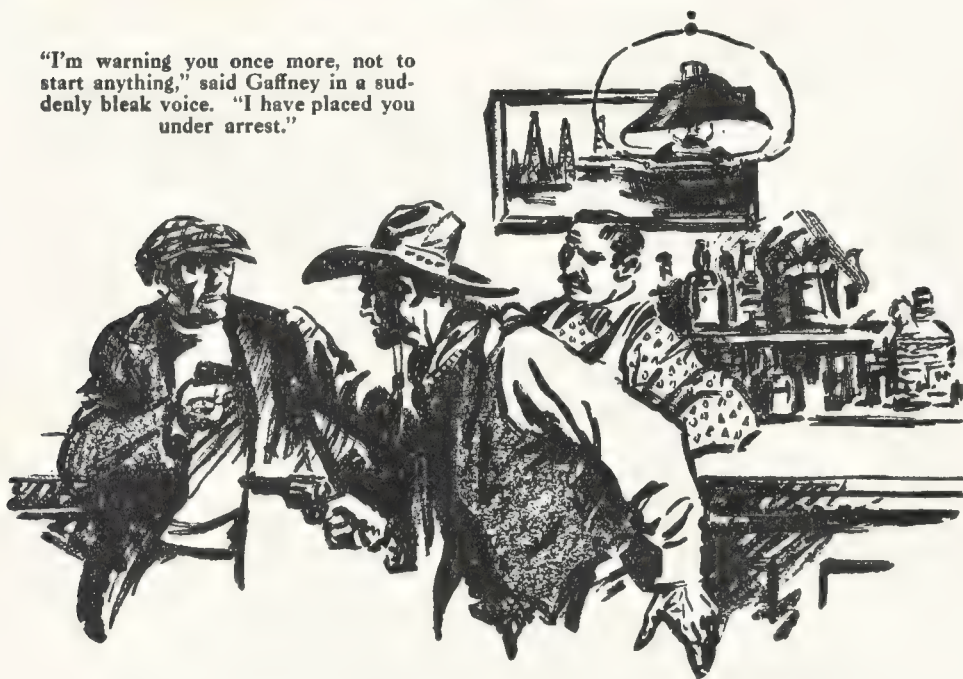
"Yeah?" snarled Husky Al. He wheeled suddenly and faced the Triangle G men. An automatic from his shoulder-holster was in his hand. "On your feet, all you birds!" snarled the mob leader. "Stick your mitts in the air and keep them there."

The Triangle G riders did as commanded, not because they were cowed by the gun in the gangster's hand, but because they dared not shoot at him for fear of injuring Ted.

"Keep your hands high," Husky Al barked at them, "and line up with your back against that wall over there."

The waddies obeyed. But as they lined up against the rear wall of the dining-room a light of hope gleamed suddenly in Ted Gaffney's eyes. There were only six men in that line. Pete Dawson was missing! Gaffney had not

"I'm warning you once more, not to start anything," said Gaffney in a suddenly bleak voice. "I have placed you under arrest."



seen what became of the old foreman, but knew he had been sitting at one of the rear tables when the trouble started.

Lying under the table where he had slid when the thug in dungarees had got the drop on Ted, Pete Dawson was waiting, gun in hand, for the moment to come when he and the .45 could swing the tide of battle. The fact that the tables were not far apart and that each was covered with a cloth that reached halfway to the floor kept Pete, in his hiding-place, from being seen by the three gangsters in the front of the room.

But trouble for the gangsters was also brewing in another quarter—and it developed before the hidden Triangle G foreman could find opportunity to go into action. The killer who had his automatic thrust against Ted Gaffney's back made a grave mistake. He forgot Stella Knight. The young proprietress of the restaurant saw that no eye was on her as the gangsters all watched the Triangle G riders lining up against the wall. Within easy reach of her hand was a row of pint bottles of ginger ale, arranged for display. Her hand stole out and grasped the neck of one of those bottles. A glance told her that nobody had noticed the move. She braced herself for a second, mustering her courage. Then with a move that would have made a cat seem clumsy, she flung her lithe body forward across the cigar counter and brought the heavy bottle down with all

her might upon the wrist that held the gun against Ted Gaffney's spine.

"Get him, Ranger!" the game girl cried as she struck. There was a howl of pain from the gunman and the dining-room echoed to the report of the automatic. But the bullet buried itself in the rough plank flooring.

Ted Gaffney spun like a top and grappled with the dungaree-clad thug as the weapon slipped from that rascal's numb fingers and clattered to the floor. They went down in a whirling tangle of arms and legs. Stella Knight had retained her grip on the neck of the bottle. As she recovered her balance after striking the fierce blow at the gangster's gun wrist, she saw Panther Sam whirl and jerk his gun from its holster. With all her strength, she flung the bottle at the scowling outlaw—and the missile found its mark. The bottom of the bottle struck the renegade squarely between the eyes and he dropped heavily.

Husky Al suddenly whirled and leaped for the street door. He gained it in safety, but not before a bullet fired by one of the 'punchers who had been lined up against the rear wall snatched the crumpled hat from his head.

A FEW minutes later the thug in dungarees and Panther Sam were prisoners of the Triangle G outfit, and the excitement had quieted down. The two renegades were bound hand and foot and



deposited in the kitchen—and the Triangle G outfit proceeded to hold a council of war.

"Do we go after them sidewinders, or do we hole up here and wait for them to come after us?" asked Pete Dawson who had rather sheepishly crawled out from under his table without having had an opportunity to pull his *coup*.

"A wise guy once said," replied Ted Gaffney, "that there is no defense like attack. Since we are outnumbered by long odds, it would be a fool stunt to stay here and wait for them to hem us in. I learned this afternoon that the headquarters of the gang is in a gambling-hall just a few blocks down this street. Since that Davis varmint managed to get away, I'm betting he'll head for that dump to gather his pack of coyotes. Let's get there as quick as we can, and prevent the gathering."

"That sounds like a smart notion," declared the old foreman.

"Miss Knight," said Ted, turning toward the game girl, "may I suggest that you and your girls go some place outside of this town for a while? It's going to be a lively place for the next few hours. Unless you have a better idea, just go out on the prairie and stay until things quiet down. That's the best suggestion I can make on the spur of the moment."

"Something tells me that it's a good one," replied the girl. "We'll do it."

"Start just as soon as you possibly can," said Ted. "I'm going to commandeer your place for a jail, since we have already deposited two prisoners in your kitchen."

"I'll gather the girls and be on my way to the open spaces, in ten minutes," Stella promised.

"Beef," said Ted, turning to address a stocky 'puncher' called Beef Larson, "you be the jailer. See that those two in the kitchen stay there; we'll be bringing you some more company shortly. —Come along, the rest of you," said Ted as he turned toward the door. "Let's get going."

SEATED at a corner table in the Palace of Fortune gambling-hall, Husky Al Davis nursed a sore jaw and a sore disposition. Harshly he demanded that those of the Davis-Collins mob who were present go at once and round up all other members in a hurry. He wanted the mob in its full strength to be assembled at the dive in half an hour.

Less than a dozen "hayseeds,"—as Husky Al contemptuously called the natives,—had made a monkey of Hell Town's big-shot—and something had to be done about it.

The gangsters who had been ordered to rally their fellows had barely departed from the Palace of Fortune when Ted Gaffney and his six followers entered. Ted paused just inside the door and surveyed the dive. Most of the numerous games were going strong. From a dozen to more than a score of men were gathered about each of the tables, and there were several women sprinkled through the crowd. The place was thick with tobacco-smoke and the odor of liquor mingled with the other unpleasant smells.

Ted's searching eyes finally found Husky Al Davis. The gang chief had seen Ted half a minute before. He pushed his chair back a trifle farther from the table and his right hand went up to the lapel of his coat, ready to dart for the automatic that rested in the spring-holster under his arm. Gaffney kept his eyes steadily fixed upon the boss hoodlum and threaded his way as directly as possible through the crowd to where Davis sat. Husky Al looked up insolently, hatred in his small porcine eyes. His right hand continued to toy with his coat lapel.

"I want you, Davis," said Ted in a quiet voice. "It will be better for all

concerned if you come along without making any fuss." He stood easily, looking down at the racketeer. He was not unaware of the hidden gun so near which Davis' hand hovered.

"Yeah?" sneered the gang leader. "I'm asking you again who the hell you think you are?"

"Folks call me Ted Gaffney," replied Ted, "and I happen to be a captain of the Rangers. I'm inviting you to come with me, on behalf of the State."

"And suppose I don't come?"

"You will." Ted's answer was quiet but carried conviction. Not for a moment did he take his eyes off the hovering right hand of the mobster.

BUT Ted had not seen a signal flashed to a henchman by Davis in those few moments that elapsed between the time the racketeer had first seen him and the moment Davis was seen by him. Therefore he was not prepared for what was soon to happen.

The six Triangle G riders who had followed their boss into the dive had scattered among the crowd and were doing as good a job as possible of keeping an eye on everything. But the crowd was large and the job was a big one for half a dozen men.

Suddenly Husky Al's hand darted for his automatic. Then he too got the same surprise as had Panther Sam, earlier in the evening: Before the gangster could bring his gun into sight, he was looking into the steady muzzle of Ted Gaffney's leveled .45.

"I'm warning you once more, not to start anything," said Gaffney in a suddenly bleak voice. "I have placed you under arrest. Will—"

The roar of a heavy-caliber revolver sounded through the room, cutting off Gaffney's speech and hushing the other clamor. The shot had been fired by the man at the near end of a bar which ran along one side of the huge room. The bullet struck Ted's gun and knocked it from his hand.

With the echo of the shot the dive was suddenly plunged into darkness. The bartender who had fired the shot had also pulled a switch beneath the bar, installed there for such emergencies. With the last split second of light, Ted Gaffney saw Husky Al finish drawing his automatic and swing its muzzle in his direction. He flung his alert body to the left and down just as the racketeer's weapon belched orange flame in the

darkness. Behind him there was a cry of pain as the bullet found a human target for which it had not been meant.

In a moment the place was a bedlam. Panic gripped the crowd and they pushed and trampled one another in their frantic efforts to quit the dive. Ted Gaffney rolled under the table at which Husky Al had been sitting and felt for the gangster's legs. But Davis had moved. Ted lay still beneath the table and waited. It was the only sensible thing to do. It was nearly fifteen minutes before the crowd had finished its mad scramble and the place grew quiet. Still Ted lay beneath the table without moving or making a sound. Another few minutes passed and then the place was suddenly brilliant with light once more. From the place of safety into which he had thrown himself beneath the bar, the Davis henchman who had shot Ted's gun from his hand and then darkened the place, had switched the lights on again.

A quick glance about the room showed Ted his 'punchers were all there; like himself, they had found places of safety. Now, guns in hand, they moved toward the center of the room. Ted scrambled from beneath the table and moved to join them. Husky Al had disappeared.

OUTSIDE, a crowd was massed; now a few of the more courageous began to enter. The bartender rose behind the counter—to find himself instantly covered by a revolver in the hand of Pete Dawson.

"This is the *hombre* who shot your hardware out of your hand," declared Pete, flicking a glance at Ted. "I saw him shoot, but he ducked under the bar and put out the lights before I could put out *his*. Shall I plug him now?"

"None of us are going to shoot anybody," snapped Ted, "if we can possibly keep from it. You can march this fellow down and turn him over to Beef at the jail. Help Beef tie him up and then get along back here. I'll be waiting for you."

The bartender was promptly herded from the place by the old foreman, and Ted turned to the other five of his men.

"You fellows," snapped their now thoroughly angry boss, "scatter and play lone hands. You all know this Davis snake. Get him. Bring him as soon as you find him—bring him, dead or alive! Deputize anybody you want to help you if you need help. We're going to get

that jasper and all of his crew; this town is going to supply the penitentiary with a fine bunch of star boarders. Get on now! Everybody report at the Southern Star at midnight, whether you have located Davis or not. I'm waiting here for Pete; as soon as he comes, we'll join you in the hunt."

The riders left the gambling-hall, intent upon carrying out their orders. The crowd began to refill the big room. The flirtations with chance were resumed as dealers, croupiers and attendants picked up overturned tables, collected their scattered paraphernalia and announced the games ready to operate.

HUSKY AL knew that he had missed, even as he pressed the trigger in that moment after darkness descended on the gaming-room. He also knew it would be useless to fire again, since there was no way of telling how far and in which direction Ted Gaffney might have moved. The burly racketeer flung himself out of his chair and slipped through the dark, along the rear wall of the hastily constructed building. He groped along the rough planks until he found the emergency exit which he had had in mind when he signaled to his henchman behind the bar. A moment later Davis was outside the dive and hurrying along a littered and rutted alley, away from the scene of danger.

What he had seen in Ted Gaffney's eyes had crystallized a decision that had been forming in the gang chief's twisted brain for some time: He would leave Hell Town, while the leaving was good!

It took Husky Al but a few minutes to reach the building in which the sixteen-cylinder car that had brought him and his fellow crooks to Hell Town was housed. In a secret hiding-place that he had made soon after arriving in the oil camp, was cached some sixty thousand dollars in gold and paper money. The hoard was his for the taking—and he meant to take it. Panther Sam had been chump enough to fall into the hands of that crew of Ranger cowmen. Nor did the four men who had come with Al to the town receive any consideration either. The wealth in that cache was not enough to split with anybody! Working hastily, the crook rifled the hiding-place and stored the money under the big auto's rear seat. Then he backed the car out and, keeping to the dark side streets, began his flight. In ten minutes he was on the road toward

Prairie Junction, where he knew he would strike a Federal highway leading to El Paso. . . . With the car and sixty thousand dollars, he could have a very pleasant vacation in Mexico while he decided what devilment he would turn to next. . . .

Keeping her promise to Ted Gaffney with minutes to spare, Stella Knight led her five girls away from the Southern Star restaurant. They hastened from there to the shack in which they had slept since opening the restaurant.

"Each of you get a blanket off your cot," Stella instructed them. "We'll probably sleep on the prairie tonight."

"Aw, Stella," protested a red-headed girl named May Lang, "why do we have to beat it just when it looks like there might be some excitement around the place?"

"Quit grumbling, and do as you are told," retorted Stella. "Get your blanket and come along!"

When the fight in the Palace of Fortune started, the six girls were nearing the straggling edge of Hell Town. Stella had chosen to follow the Prairie Junction trail for a distance before striking out onto the open prairie to find a place where she and her charges might spend the night.

There was little traffic on the trail and the girls trudged along swiftly with their blankets under their arms.

"Can't we stay where we can *hear* hell popping—even if we can't see it?" begged red-headed May, when they had gone perhaps a quarter of a mile beyond the town.

"We'll bed down pretty soon," Stella replied. "I remember a place I saw the other day that will be a perfect spot—if I can find it in the dark."

THEY covered another quarter mile, and Stella was upon the point of leaving the trail, when they heard the sound of a powerful motor behind them and a car swung around a bend of the road to pick them up in the twin beams of its great lamps. It was the sixteen-cylinder auto in which Husky Al was heading for other and safer parts.

The renegade behind the wheel saw the girls and recognized them. He swung the car to one side of the trail and brought it to a halt. Since his arrival in Hell Town, he had had his eye on Stella Knight. Here was a chance that he did not mean to overlook. Such was his thought as he halted the car.

"Well, well," he chuckled, leaning out the open window, "aint this nice? Good evening, Miss Knight. Can I give you a lift?"

"No, you can't," snapped Stella as the girls moved off the trail and out of the white glare of the headlamps. "Come on, girls!" She started out across the prairie at right angles to the trail.

There was an ugly chuckle from Husky Al as he snapped on the car's powerful spotlight and picked up the fleeing girls.

"Come back here," he called after them, "or I'll make you wish you had."

STELLA made no answer, and the girls continued to hurry away across the level prairie. The gangster held the spot on them steadily and called again for them to return. Then with a growled curse he shifted gears and swung the huge auto from the trail. Before they were a hundred yards from the trail the girls were forced to scatter and scramble frantically out of the way as the car bore down upon them, plunging over the plain in second gear and driven with murderous intent by the angry renegade.

Davis jerked the car to an abrupt stop and laughed nastily as he swept the beam of the spotlight over the scattered group of girls.

"Now will you be good?" he demanded. "I'm a nice guy if you don't get me mad, but I'm used to having molls do what I tell 'em to."

May Lang scrambled to her feet from where a fender had sent her sprawling on the grass.

"Come on, Stella—all of you," she cried. "There are six of us. Let's work this big bum over."

As she spoke she grabbed the handle and flung open the front door of the car. Then she leaped at Husky Al with the evident purpose of dragging him out of the car. The gangster jerked his automatic from under his arm and as the girl sprang forward he struck her a wicked blow on the side of the head. She reeled back and fell in a limp heap.

"Now there's only five of you," snarled Davis, "and there'll be a damned sight fewer if you get gay again! Get in the bus, Miss Knight. The rest of you molls can go to hell,—or any place else you want to, as far as I'm concerned,—but I'm taking *you* with me, baby."

"Says you!" drawled a heavy voice, as a figure in range garb stepped up from

behind the car and a brown and sinewy hand grasped the wrist that held the automatic trained on the badly frightened girls.

In the excitement nobody had heard the soft thud of hoofs on the dusty trail. But Mush Hogan and Indian Joe, riding hard toward Hell Town, had seen the entire episode as it was enacted. Now their sweating mounts were standing a short distance back of the big auto. It was Mush Hogan's hand that gripped the wrist of Husky Al. Bracing his feet, Hogan gave a yank and the gangster came tumbling out of the car. A sharp twist, and the blackguard uttered a howl of pain as the automatic fell from his fingers and he was flung sprawling beside the still heap that was May Lang.

"Just who is this buzzard, miss?" Hogan inquired, looking at Stella Knight; "and what do you want done with him?"

"His name is Davis," replied Stella, "and he's a dirty crook. There is a Ranger, Captain Gaffney, in town who would like very much to see him."

"Ted Gaffney wants him, eh?" exclaimed Hogan. Then turning to the Indian who stood at his shoulder: "Hear that, Joe? Reckon we'll have to deliver the polecat to Ted."

The redskin grunted.

"Do you know where to find Ted Gaffney?" Hogan asked Stella Knight.

"He is using my restaurant for a jail," answered Stella, "and he started out a while ago to arrest this Davis and his gang of crooks. It looks as if he had Davis on the run."

HOGAN prodded the sprawled and cowering gangster with the toe of a riding-boot.

"Get up, you coyote," ordered the 'puncher. "We'll take you back to town and see what the boss wants to do with you."

Husky Al, disarmed and the fight gone out of him, got heavily to his feet.

"Can any of you ladies drive this car?" Hogan inquired.

"I can," replied Stella, who was kneeling beside May Lang. The red-head was moaning with returning consciousness.

"Then if you can take your friends back to town in it," went on Hogan, "Joe and me will tie up this woman-fighter and take him in to Ted."

Suddenly Husky Al thought he saw an opportunity. He stooped and made a grab for the weapon that Hogan had twisted from his hand. With a single

swift bound, Indian Joe alighted beside him and brought the barrel of a six-gun down with a sharp crack on the gangster's head. Davis crumpled and pitched forward on his face.

"Um plenty tied now," remarked the red man casually.

May Lang had just struggled to a sitting position and was looking about her when the cook felled Davis.

"Fine!" she cried. "Sock him another for me!"

BACK in Hell Town the henchmen sent out by Husky Al to gather the mob had done their work. Shortly after the Palace of Fortune had resumed operations, more than half a hundred of the gangsters and outlaws were gathered in the place awaiting orders. But the big-shot could not be located. Listening to the story of what had happened prior to the stampede from the dive, the mobsters decided their chief was also a prisoner along with Panther Sam and the other two at the Southern Star restaurant. They held a council of war and decided to liberate their leaders and comrades.

Irish Dugan heard enough, from where he was loitering around the edge of the conference, to get the idea. He left quickly and hurried down the street to the Southern Star. Before the place he drew his six-gun and fired the Triangle G call for help: Fire once; count three slowly; fire twice in quick succession; count three again; fire once.

Thus it happened that Ted Gaffney and his seven 'punchers' reached the restaurant-jail a few minutes before the gangsters, on rescue bent, came surging down the street. They halted before the Southern Star and announced their arrival and intentions by firing half a dozen shots through the windows. One of the thugs who had come with Husky Al from the East had appointed himself leader of the rescue gang. He called to the 'punchers, barricaded in the kitchen with their prisoners, to free the captives and be quick about it.

On the street, all except the gangsters had fled from the scene, to watch from a distance beyond danger from flying bullets. Ted Gaffney saw this and snapped orders to his men.

"Open up on them, boys," ordered the young rancher. "They've asked for it—and they know they are fighting the law. The ones we kill will be less expense to the State than the ones we don't."

The partition between kitchen and dining-room did not reach the ceiling. By standing on chairs or boxes the defenders of the place were able to look over it. They now rose in unison and their revolvers spat lead into the closely packed mob before the windows—or the openings that had been windows.

Gangsters began to fall; the mob suddenly realized its folly, and the return fire was slight as the renegades and gunmen fell over each other in their efforts to get out of range.

"That's that!" cried Ted Gaffney through the haze of powder-smoke. "Next will be rifle-fire from across the street—and a try at us through the back of the kitchen. We'd better get ready for it."

But it soon developed that such preparation was unnecessary.

At the edge of town, coming in with their prisoner, Mush Hogan and Indian Joe had heard the Triangle G rally-signal. They spurred their horses, to the physical—and audible—discomfort of Husky Al, tied like a blanket-roll behind Hogan's saddle.

Now, as the mobsters fled from the danger zone before the Southern Star restaurant, the two riders and their hostage came shouting around a corner and bore down upon the disorganized renegades. Indian Joe's knife severed Husky Al's bonds and Hogan dragged the former gang chief from the horse. A moment later Husky Al, with Hogan's revolver muzzle pressed against his back, was obeying the Irish 'puncher's order to call off his men.

Hogan's booming voice carried into the restaurant, and brought Ted and the other riders pouring out to cover the flank of the bewildered mob.

The fight was all over.

TWO weeks later law and order had become a reality under the permanent supervision of a troop of Rangers, and Husky Al and his cohorts were in the county jail awaiting trial on charges ranging all the way from murder down to petty thievery.

Stella Knight and her girls went back on the job at the Southern Star. Soon the restaurant expanded into the adjoining building. The cooking at the Triangle G is now a much lighter task for old Indian Joe—and if the mounts at the ranch could express a wish, it would be that Cottonwood Bend was not so many miles from the home corral!

***I**T has been said that every man's life, if all its facts were known, would make a very interesting novel. At any rate, we believe that every man's life has included at least one episode sufficiently exciting to deserve record; and in this belief we offer each month prizes for the best stories of Real Experience submitted. (For details see page 3). First a one-time British Intelligence officer (he's now a business man in New York) tells of the terrific experience he encountered while running down a Chinese pirate.*

REAL EX-

Tiger Bait

THE age-old business of piracy has not diminished one iota on the rivers of China; and from Bias Bay, a swamp-lined inlet on the Canton Coast, vicious raiders are still a deadly menace to shipping in the China Sea. Several pirate chiefs have made the newspaper headlines and achieved a world-wide reputation, but it was the experience of my division of the Criminal Intelligence Department that the real powers behind the pirate operations were seldom mentioned.

At the time of this episode, my headquarters were in Singapore. Through informers we learned that the pirates' most efficient leader was one Yu Peng Hwa, a burly, pockmarked, educated Cantonese who owned an opium factory and ran a gambling house in Macao. Yu Peng Hwa was on our list of suspects, but up to this time we had no direct evidence to connect him with the pirate ring. It was therefore with much satisfaction that I heard the story of a young Hylam informer. The Chinaman stated that six months previously, he had been in the service of Yu Peng Hwa and could produce evidence which would convict his former employer of piracy. What was more to the point, he told us that the pirate chief was at this moment in Singapore, and was holding a meeting in an opium den on Jalan Sungei, a street less than two miles distant.

Hastily I organized a force of my detectives and Malay policemen, and aided by two inspectors of police, threw a cordon around the street. The raid which followed in the inky darkness of

the low Chinese hovel was a hectic affair, where the police clubs contended against knives and short spears made by sticking files into the ends of bamboo poles. Eventually the police clubs triumphed, and twenty battered and bloody captives were led off and booked on charges of illegal assembly, and so forth. But during the mêlée Yu Peng Hwa had escaped, and I had received an injury which put me in a hospital for a week.

On leaving the hospital, I decided that a little toning up was due me, and that a week-end spent in hunting would probably supply the necessary tonic. Loading Semut, my Malay orderly, into the rumble seat of my roadster, and armed with rifle and toothbrush, I left on Friday afternoon for the rubber estate of my friend Keales, which was situated in almost virgin jungle about thirty miles from the small seaport of Segamat on the east coast of Johore, a hundred miles from Singapore.

After lunch on Saturday I wandered leisurely around the edge of the jungle scouting for deer sign. I didn't expect to see game, as it rarely moves except in early morning or evening, and I was consequently startled when a *rusa* (sambar deer) sprang from a patch of scrub almost at my feet. I was so rattled that I fired wildly, the bullet striking too far back to be instantly effective. Cursing my carelessness, I took up the track of the deer and discovered that he was following a narrow but well-defined trail through the dense undergrowth. For about a mile and a half I sweated through the breathless, humid air, disturbing the siestas of countless indignant monkeys and parrakeets.

Then the jungle trail opened into a small clearing of a couple of acres, planted with rubber, in the center of which was a ramshackle bamboo house. At its threshold I saw the body of my deer, and a broad trail starting almost at my feet showed me how the animal had been dragged to its present position. Two

PERIENCES

By
CAPTAIN PATRICK
ALEXANDER

women and a boy emerged from the house as I approached, and answered my inquiry as to the whereabouts of their men-folks with blank stares.

Being very thirsty, and not caring to sample their water, I asked them for a young coconut. Without a word all three disappeared into the house. Leaning my rifle against a tree I seated myself on a crude bench. Although I do not speak Chinese, I am able to recognize many words in the various dialects, and I was now amazed to hear my Chinese sobriquet "*Lo Fu!*" (the tiger) repeated several times in the conversation that drifted to me from the house. I was still idly wondering how I happened to be known to these ignorant coolies, when they suddenly emerged from the doorway. Too late then, I saw that two men were concealed behind the figures of the women and were covering me with rifles. Stepping out from their human shelter, but still keeping their weapons leveled, they curtly ordered, "*Unkat tangan!*" I wasted no time in getting my hands up. One of the men bound me securely with long lengths of coconut fiber rope, and dragged me to a tree, to which they tied me.

To my demands for an explanation, they maintained a sulky silence, until finally, goaded by an insulting remark from me uttered in vile Chinese, one of my captors turned and spat at me, as with appropriate gestures he informed me that when Yu Peng Hwa found me here he would "kill the white dog."

The pirate leader after escaping from Singapore had hidden himself on this lonely *kebun*, and these henchmen of his supposed I had tracked him down.

FOR two hours or more I lay suffering the tortures of the damned. The rope cut into my body, and the cramp and pain from impaired circulation became almost unbearable. To add to my misery, mosquitoes and big red ants played such havoc with my arms, legs and face



that I could scarcely see through the swelling flesh.

In the late afternoon, just before dark, a powerfully built, pockmarked Chinaman whom I instinctively knew was Yu Peng Hwa came into the clearing. Sneeringly he gazed down on me, and loosed a long tirade in Cantonese of which I could understand nothing. One of his followers began to brandish a *parang* threateningly around my head, but this did not intimidate me, for I realized that the pirate chief would manage my death in such a way that the murder of a Government official would not be added to his long list of crimes.

Quickly enough Yu Peng Hwa's intentions became obvious. Silencing a prolonged argument between his followers, the chief issued instructions. Instantly two of his men slung the carcass of the deer onto a pole and started into the jungle. Two more Chinamen treated me in a similar manner, and like a trussed pig, scratched by thorns and sick and dizzy from my inverted position, I was swung on a pole through the rapidly darkening forest. Arriving at a small clearing, bordered by a little stream, I was dumped unceremoniously beside the body of the deer, and my bonds removed. My freedom was short, however, for under threatening guns and *parangs*, my captors again secured me, this time with living rattan, and in silence filed away.

As they disappeared through the thick undergrowth, I fought hard to keep from shrieking for mercy, even though I knew such an appeal would be wasted effort.

Yu Peng Hwa's devilish cunning had indeed devised a horrible death for me. This place where I was tied was an ideal watering-place for wild animals, and it was only a question of time before the smell of the deer would attract the attention of tigers or panthers, who would tear me to pieces. Even should I escape such a death by some miracle, I was sure to die of thirst and madness. Later, if by chance a Malay hunter stumbled across my remains, he would simply suppose I had had some accident and in all likelihood wouldn't even bother to report it to the authorities. To add credence to this version, Yu Peng Hwa had left my rifle and hunting-knife close by but tantalizingly out of my reach.

Oblivious of the thorns that pierced my flesh, for natural growing rattan is like barbed wire, I frantically struggled to reach my knife, but the tenacious creeper would not give sufficiently. Exhausted, I sank back. Darkness settled with tropical suddenness over the jungle; by this time Keales would begin to wonder at my absence, for he would know that even were I waiting for a "still shot," I could not see to shoot after dark. If he became anxious soon enough, Semut, my orderly, an excellent hunter and tracker, might possibly be able to trace me with a flashlight, but I feared he would be unable to track me beyond the Chinese rubber *kebun*.

HOURS seemed to pass. My nerves became so frayed I wanted to scream. Every jungle sound was intensified to my straining ears, and even the most innocent of them seemed to hold a deadly menace. Presently I became aware of a distinctly defined sound, like the approach of a human being. Perhaps they had come back to finish me off!

"Si apa itu?" I called anxiously, and again in English: "Who's that?"

"Orang Chena, tuan," came the reply in the high-pitched tones of a Chinaman speaking Malay. I felt rather than saw a figure approach and squat beside me. Keyed up with excitement and fear, not knowing what to expect, I waited for him to speak. "Lo Fu, is your tongue that of a Biawa?" The Chinaman spoke good Malay, using an idiom to ask me whether I could be trusted.

"Yes," I assured him, "I speak truth."

"Then, tuan," he continued in Malay, "if I cut you loose, you will give me lima pulok ringgit and not see me again?"

Only fifty dollars for my freedom! I'd say I would; my spirits rose, but I bargained: "For that you must guide me to the *kebun* of Tuan Keales."

"Bulih!" he agreed, and in a trice I was free, working to bring circulation into my stiff limbs. As soon as I was able to walk, I followed my youthful guide, who had told me he was the son of one of the women in the hut. He explained that his father had recently died, and that his mother required money to send the body back to China, where it might lie with its ancestors. Yu Peng Hwa had been brought to the little farm by the husband of the second woman, this youth's aunt, and he had held them all in a state of terror. Only the need for the burial money would have induced the mother and son to risk their lives by freeing me.

TO my amazement, when we finally reached Keales' bungalow, I found it was only nine-thirty, and Keales but just beginning to wonder at my prolonged absence. After hurried explanations, I dispatched Keales to Segamat for half a dozen Malay police.

He was back by midnight with an inspector of police, and eight constables. Fearing that Yu Peng Hwa might again escape in the darkness, and not wishing the women to be harmed, I declined to raid the place immediately but disposed my force on two sides of the house, and arranged with my young rescuer that at dawn he would lead his aunt and mother from the hut. With luck, the criminals would still be asleep, and we could jump them without unnecessary loss of life.

The plan almost worked. At dawn the youth and the women left as we planned, but I suspect the aunt couldn't refrain from arousing her husband and warning him, for as we crept to the door, we were met by a terrific blast of rifle fire. Badly aimed as it was, two of the plucky little Malay policemen went down under it. Yu Peng Hwa and his men charged into the open, making a spectacular dash for the jungle and freedom. The ensuing hand-to-hand scuffle was brief and bloody, Yu Peng Hwa being the last to die under the bayonets of the fiery little Malays.

The death of Yu Peng Hwa proved so severe a setback to the pirate *kongsi*, that after time had dimmed the memory of my experience I felt the hours spent in the jungle as tiger bait had been well invested.

The Sheep and the Silver

One of our women readers tells of a girlhood encounter with a tramp that ended with a surprise.

By SUSAN MERTON

THIS incident happened while I was a young girl at my father's farm. There were only four in our family, my father, mother, my brother Tom and myself.

An uncle of ours had given Tom an old ram, and Tom and his playfellows had taught the ram to fight. Now a person had to keep one eye on old Sam—that was the ram's name—or he would butt you before you knew he was around.

One morning my father came in from the barn, with his hands and clothes wet and covered with mud, his face irate.

"Tom!" he shouted, as he entered the kitchen. "Where's Tom?"

"Here I am," cried my brother, and in an instant he entered the kitchen from the adjoining woodshed, where he had been cutting potatoes for the day's planting. "Do you want anything?"

"I want to tell you this," said Father angrily, as he washed himself at the sink and rubbed his weather-beaten face with the coarse towel. "Old Sam must be killed! Just see the state I am in, and all from that worthless old rascal. He butted me into the watering-trough!"

Two hours later, Father and Mother drove away to be absent from home until night. As they rattled out of the yard Father turned, shook his whip at the old ram and cried: "This is your last day, my boy! Make the most of it!"

After we had sadly considered for a while whether there was any way of averting old Sam's fate, Tom shouldered his hoe and went off to his work of planting potatoes in the "back lot."

Although I was only thirteen I had no thought of fear at being left alone in the house. I was preparing vegetables for dinner, when there came a faint knock at the door. I called:

"Come in!"

The door was slowly opened and a man stepped within.



He wore a blue coat, buttoned up to his chin, and very threadbare. His blue trousers, too, were shabby, and much too short for him. On one foot was a boot, while the other was graced by a ragged shoe. He carried a battered derby hat in his hand. His long, solemn face was red, his eyes bleary. His hands were dirty, and altogether, he was a queer-looking caller.

"Is your ma at home, Miss?" said he, in a half whine, as he glanced sharply about the room.

"No sir," I replied, wondering why he asked. "She has gone to Farley. Did you wish to see her?"

"Oh, no," the man replied; "I only asked out of politeness, you know." And he smiled solemnly at me and winked one eye. "No, I came on business with your pa—particular, urgent business. S'pose he's round, is he not?"

"No sir, he went to town with Mother," I replied.

"Now, that's too bad," exclaimed the visitor, as he seated himself; "and I've come so far to see him! But perhaps your brother or sister would do as well."

"I haven't any sister," I answered, laughing, "and my brother's over in the back lot. He'll be in by-and-by, though, if he'll do."

"Well, I don't hardly believe he will, after all," said the man, shaking his head thoughtfully, "and I can't wait today, anyway; I haint got time. But I'm terribly hungry. If I could, I'd stay to dinner, Miss. However, under the circumstances, perhaps you'd better give me a light lunch before I go; a piece of pie and a cup of tea and a little meat, or something of that sort."

"Oh, certainly! I can't give you the meat, for we haven't any in the house," I said, rising; "but I'll find something." And I brought from the pantry a whole apple pie, which I placed before him, with a knife and fork.

"If you will help yourself, I'll have the tea ready in three minutes."

"All right, my dear," said the man, seizing the knife and drawing the pie toward him. "I will act upon your advice. The last time I took dinner with President Wilson," he continued, as he cut a great piece and began to eat, "he said to me, 'Governor', said he, 'never disregard a lady's advice!' And I have always remembered what he said." He chuckled, and nodded his head at the appetizing pastry before him.

I WONDERED a little at the table manners of this man who had dined with President Wilson, as I steeped the tea, flavored it with rich cream and sugar, and passed it to him.

"I'm not much of a hand for tea," said the man, as he drained the cup, "but my doctor says I must drink it for my digestion. Ruined my digestion while I was in the department at Washington, you see." And he winked solemnly. "By the way," he continued, picking up the silver teaspoon from his saucer, "have you any more of these? They are as neat a pattern as I ever saw, and good too. I would like to see the entire dozen, if you have them."

"Mother has only eleven," I said, thinking it strange that he wanted to see all of them, "but I'll show them to you."

Then I brought the little box with the precious table silver—eleven teaspoons, four tablespoons and an ancient cream-jug—all pure silver—and placed them before my inquisitive visitor to admire.

He had finished his "light lunch." That is, the pie was demolished and the teapot empty. As I handed him the treasures, he arose, took the box to the window, examined its contents with a critical eye for a moment, and then, as if in joyful surprise, said:

"I am right! They are the very spoons—the identical spoons that my friend lost when he was a boy! How lucky it is that I have found them at last!"

With these words, and a low bow, the rascal opened the door and slipped away with the spoons and the silver cream-pitcher down the path toward the gate.

For an instant I stood motionless; then rushing after him, I shrieked:

"Give me those spoons! They are my mother's spoons, and you are trying to steal them! You are a thief—a thief! Bring them back! Bring them back!"

Old Sam was quietly nibbling the grass near the gateway. Hearing my voice, he looked up at the very instant the tramp passed. What he saw about the man to disturb him, I don't know; but lifting his head with a hoarse "*Baa-a-a!*" he shot like a cannonball after the thief.

The man turned to defend himself; but the ram struck him fairly in front and knocked him down, flat on his back, scattering the silver in all directions.

For an instant the fellow remained sprawling in the dust; then he slowly arose, limping and groaning, and began to gather up his stolen spoils.

He had partly completed his task when old Sam, who had been watching the proceedings from beneath his shaggy eyebrows, shook his long beard, and with another tremendous "*Baa-a-a!*" dashed at him again, and over he went a second time, his treasures flying from his hands.

And now began a strange battle. With cries of rage and pain the man recovered his feet and turned upon the ram, kicking and striking at him furiously, while Sam, accustomed to such warfare from years of experience with the boys of the countryside, easily eluded him, and in return butted him to earth repeatedly; the air was filled with bad language, angry "*baas*," and a great cloud of dust.

But after some five minutes, victory declared itself on the side of the quadruped; then, bruised and bleeding, his clothes in rags, and minus hat and shoes, the vanquished man suddenly turned and limped hurriedly down the road, leaving his antagonist in possession of the field and the stolen silver.

Old Sam remained motionless, gazing across at his enemy, until he disappeared around a distant turn in the road; then, shaking the dust from his coarse wool, he gave utterance to a low grumble of satisfaction, and wagging his tail, returned to his dinner in front of the house.

Half an hour later, as I washed the coveted spoons and the bright little pitcher, and laid them away once more, I told Tom the story of how the thief was foiled; and Tom cried joyfully: "I don't believe Father will shoot Sam now!"

AND Tom was right; but always after that Father managed to keep an eye on old Sam, especially when he was near the watering-trough!

A Dive Into Danger

Mr. Dolan's home folks in New Rochelle, N. Y., are very proud of him. Justly—for the exploit here recorded won for him a Carnegie Award.

By FRANK DOLAN



THE summer of 1921 I found myself at home in New York, just honorably discharged from the Navy, and at a complete loss what to do with myself. Though I was only nineteen, I had already served a year in the Coast Guard and two in the Navy.

After ineffectually seeking occupation in New York, I met a young friend who was serving on the State school-ship *Newport*, learning to become an officer in the Merchant Marine. Here I could capitalize on my three years' experience, and also do something that I liked. I looked up the requirements and discovered that my previous service qualified me for a third mate's license, but that in order to pass the required examination it would be necessary for me to go to a navigation-school.

My funds were low; the tuition for the school would be about fifty dollars, and I would require money to live upon while attending, so I decided to go to sea for a while as a sailor. Shipping was dull then, but I finally managed to ship as A.B. on a freighter plying between New York and London. This ship we will call the *Mermaid*, though that was not its name.

In the fore-castle of the *Mermaid* I wasn't very popular with the other sailors: I was the youngest A.B. of the lot; most of the others were hard-boiled old shellbacks with a hearty contempt for my Navy brand of seamanship, and I had unwisely spoken of my ambition to become a mate.

However, I soon struck up a friendship with a couple of the sailors, Clark and Dietz, and with the officer's messman, a young English chap by the name of Penfield. Penfield was in reality a licensed radio operator but was making

this trip to see his mother, who though she now lived in the United States, was making a prolonged visit with relatives.

Penfield was a very decent young fellow and nearer my own age than any of the others, so we naturally gravitated toward each other.

On our arrival in England we went to Tilbury, a small town about twenty miles below London on the Thames, to discharge our cargo. I spent nearly every evening I had ashore, in London—taking in the sights of that famous old city. It was on my return from one of these excursions, after we had been in port several days, that I met Clark and Penfield as I stepped off the last train from London. After exchanging greetings we set out to go aboard ship together. It was shortly after one o'clock on the morning of October 19th, 1921.

At the dock gate we stopped and chatted with the constable on duty there for a couple of minutes.

We were in exuberant good spirits as we walked down the docks from the gate and approached the ship.

Penfield proceeded up the ship's gangway first, Clark next, while I brought up in the rear. I was halfway up the gangway and still chuckling over a quip of Penfield's, when the laughter froze on my lips, for on reaching the top of the gangway, Penfield tripped and fell over the ship's side.

As his body hurtled to the water nearly thirty feet below, the unfortunate lad uttered a piercing agonized shriek. Only about two feet of space separated the ship from the quay, and I thought he was going to land on the solid stone of the quay—but he disappeared between the ship and the quay, landing in the water. I stood horrified for an instant,

then turned and raced back down to the quay.

The top of the dock wall upon which I stood was about eight feet above the surface of the water and it was pitch dark down there between the ship and dock. I was unable to see a thing, but I heard a gurgling sound, so I hastily tore off my shoes, coat and trousers and jumped into the water. I splashed about in the dark; just then Penfield came to the surface and I grabbed him.

The face of the dock wall was of solid smooth-surfaced masonry with not even a hand-hold, while on the other side rose the sheer steel side of the ship. I had difficulty keeping afloat, so with a tight grip on Penfield, I braced myself between the ship and the dock. Clark had followed me onto the quay, and I shouted to him to get a rope. Then to my horror I felt the huge ship slowly surging in toward the quay. I remembered then that the ship was moored without fenders, and terror-stricken, I shouted to Clark to get something and throw it between the ship and the wall and fend it off. But the quay was clean of anything suitable for the purpose. Clark did find a short piece of dunnage and he made a vain attempt to hold it between the ship and the dock wall, but it was too frail and it broke; the fragments fell on us below. The ship kept pressing in closer and closer. I flattened myself against the stone wall, holding Penfield alongside of me, while the ship squeezed us tight against the wall.

I was in despair, for I was unable to help myself. No panorama of my past flashed before me as some claim happens when they are facing death; my only thought was to get out—and of what a fool I'd been to get in there in the first place! I could feel the pressure of the ship against my back and was screaming to Clark to "Do something!"—when the pressure lessened as the ship unaccountably started to surge outward again.

JUST then the company's night watchman on the ship, attracted by our shouting, came on deck and tossed down the end of one of the cargo-boom guys. Grasping the line, I took a hasty turn with it about Penfield, and then scrambled hand-over-hand up it onto the dock. Clark and I then tried to pull Penfield up, but I hadn't made him fast properly and the poor boy, unconscious, was unable to help himself and he slipped out of the line and into the water again.

By this time the ship was again nearly two feet off the dock, so grasping the line I slid down once more into the water. I again managed to grasp Penfield as he came to the surface; this time I didn't attempt to make fast with the line, but wrapped my arms and legs about him, and grasping the line with my hands I inched my way up it. The old watchman meanwhile joined Clark on the quay and with their combined efforts I got back on the dock with Penfield just as the ship started to surge inward again.

Later we learned what had caused the ship to surge like that back and forth alongside the dock. The mooring-lines were slack, and the ship was moored just inside the locks of the dock. On account of the great rise and fall in the tide over there all the docks have locks at their entrances so as to keep the water in the docks at a uniform level. It being high tide at this time, the locks were open to flood the docks to the highest level, and the tide rushing in caused the ship to surge back and forth as it took up the slack in the mooring-lines.

PENFIELD was unconscious, apparently lifeless, when we got back on the quay. I had learned artificial respiration and how to care for an apparently drowned person while serving as a surfman in the Coast Guard, so I immediately set to work right there on the quay. After about twenty minutes my labor was rewarded by signs of life from the poor fellow. However, I was unsuccessful in my efforts to bring him back to consciousness. It was cold there on the quay; I was clad only in my wet underclothes and my teeth were beginning to chatter. I was also bruised and scratched from the rough stone and the rusty, rough side of the ship when I had jumped in the water. The watchman had gone in search of a police constable to get medical aid, so Clark and I carried Penfield aboard-ship and to his room, where we stripped him of his wet clothing and dried off his body with towels and wrapped him in his blankets. I continued my efforts to bring him back to consciousness, but they were all in vain. Presently the watchman returned, accompanied by a policeman and two of the ship's officers, whose names I'll omit, for obvious reasons.

The watchman had evidently given the ship's officers the impression that we were all drunk, for on entering the room

they hardly glanced at the boy lying there in his bunk and in spite of my protestations that the lad was injured, they said that he'd be all right in the morning when he sobered up. They then left, going to their own quarters.

I asked the police constable to get a doctor. He seemed willing and even anxious to do so, but said he couldn't call a doctor aboard the ship without authority or a request from one of the ship's officers. Clark went off in search of a doctor, thinking that there might be one aboard one of the many passenger vessels lying in the docks. I went to the forecabin and wakened one of the other sailors, and told him what had happened. He got up and said he'd fetch a doctor. He hastily threw on his clothes and set off. Meanwhile I washed the blood and dirt off my body and put on dry clothes, then went back to Penfield. After a long time the sailor came back with a Doctor Moore from one of the passenger-ships. The doctor examined Penfield and ordered his removal to the Tilbury Cottage Hospital. Nearly two hours had elapsed since I got the boy out of the water and I was thoroughly exhausted, so I went to my bunk after they took poor Penfield away in a stretcher. Next morning I was too tired and bruised and sore to get up and turn to, so I remained in my bunk. Later I was told that Penfield had died in the hospital shortly after he had arrived there. That same afternoon the chief officer delegated me to list and pack Penfield's clothes and personal effects. On going through his papers I was successful in finding a letter from his mother, giving her London address. I went to the post office and sent her a telegram stating that her son had been injured and to come at once. The letter having been signed merely "Mother," I addressed the telegram to "Mrs. Penfield." She narrowly missed getting the message, for Penfield proved to be an assumed name. Penfield had been a British subject and had assumed his American brother-in-law's identity in order to secure American identification-papers so that he could work on American ships.

HIS mother came to Tilbury the next day as the Coroner's inquiry into her son's death was being held at the Basin Tavern. A Coroner's Court in England is a very dignified and formal proceeding. All the witnesses are summoned and the whole affair thoroughly

investigated. The watchman and officers testified that we were all drunk the night of the accident. This incensed me and when it came my turn to testify, I refuted their statements that we were intoxicated, and the policeman who had admitted us to the docks bore me out.

The Coroner of course rendered a verdict of accidental death, censuring the ship's officers for not having lifelines properly rigged at the head of the gangway and also for not immediately obtaining medical attention for the boy. However, he warmly commended me for my efforts to save my chum's life.

We sailed a few days later, taking the body of poor Penfield—as we had known him—back with us. Of the voyage home the less said the better; it wasn't a pleasant two weeks for me. . . . On our arrival in New York I was discharged.

SHORTLY afterward I joined as quartermaster the S. S. *Centennial State* of the U. S. Lines, a passenger-ship also plying between New York and London.

On my return from my second voyage on the *Centennial State* I was mystified to learn that the New York police had been making inquiries concerning my whereabouts, and I went to the Bureau of Missing Persons in New York to ask about it. They told me that they had been requested by Scotland Yard to try to locate me as there were life-saving awards awaiting me in England. When I told them my ship was sailing for London in a few days, they said they would communicate with Scotland Yard and inform them of my impending arrival.

It appeared that when the facts of the incident were reported to Mr. E. C. Stuart Baker, chief police officer of the Port of London Authority, he had secured for me the Royal Humane Society's silver medal and the Carnegie Trust Fund's Award, and ten pounds sterling. Mr. Baker knew only my name and that I was an able seaman on the *Mermaid*, so he had to enlist the aid of Scotland Yard to find me.

Soon after our arrival in London on that trip Mr. Baker, accompanied by a delegation of police, army and navy officers and several captains and officers of various ships, came aboard the *Centennial State* and in the ship's saloon made the presentation. Mr. Baker made a very nice speech, praising the effort I had made. . . . Well, I have the medal and the award—but I was unable to save my pal.

Five Bears

I—Fishing for Bruin

By EDGAR SHEPARD

WHILE prospecting a few years ago, I spent the winter in the Mogollon Mountains of New Mexico, out from Silver City, with only my part-Airedale dog Jeff, for a companion. In the late fall Jeff became interested in a certain spot on the hillside about a mile from camp, and on looking it over I concluded a bear must have chosen the place to hole-up in for the winter. I admonished Jeff as best I could to stay away from there. Our business was hunting for a workable mineral claim, not mining for bears.

Prospecting kept me occupied during all the time the weather permitted; but about Christmas week there came a heavy fall of snow and a cold snap that kept us indoors—if being behind our one rough plank door, in an old log shanty, could be called that. I developed a longing for some fresh meat, and this, along with my enforced idleness, led to my undertaking a wild project—I decided to investigate the bear den.

I took a small crowbar, my rifle, and of course the never-absent Jeff, and going up to the den, began operations. I figured that I would dig in and open up the entrance, build a smudgy fire, and by fanning the smoke back into the bear's sleeping-quarters, rouse him to the open in quest of fresh air, then use my rifle. After considerable labor I got enough rocks removed to throw in a couple of lighted pine-knots, followed by some damp needles and bark, making quite a smudge. But I could not fan the smoke very far back into the tunnel; it escaped upward through the crevices in the rocks.

Deciding such tactics would make no progress, I returned to camp for more equipment. Returning with my ax, I cut a long aspen sapling, and pushed it into the opening and as far back as it would reach, which was about twenty feet. While poking around with this sapling, I was suddenly rewarded, or

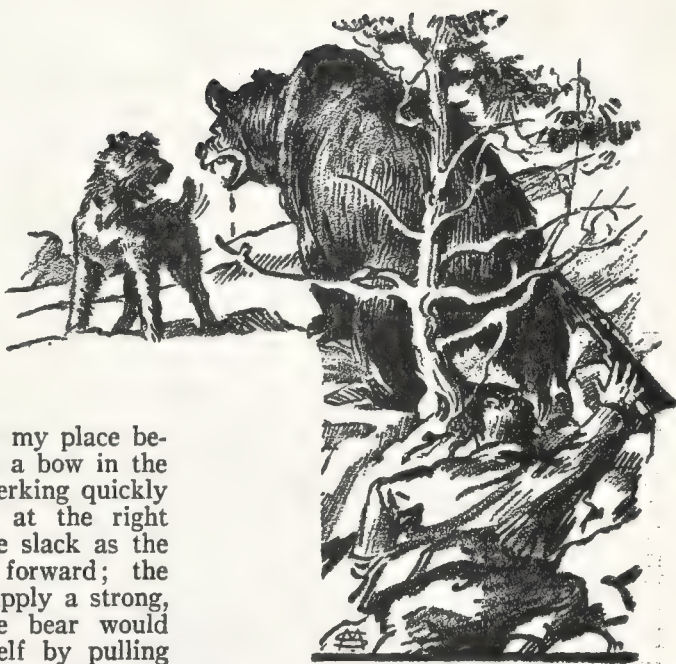
rather warned, by a rumbling, menacing growl, and on withdrawing the sapling I saw a mark on the end of the pole indicating that this bear had jaws which would make short work of one man and one dog.

On thinking the matter over after we returned to camp, I concluded that the idea of poking the bear with a pole until he ran out—no telling how fast, and in a frame of mind that would make him dangerous as an exploding shell—did not appeal to me. But prudence eventually gave way before the persistent idea that an iron hook on the end of that aspen sapling, assisted by a rope tied to the pole and snubbed around a small pine tree that stood close to the entrance of the den, would effect that bear's removal, and permit a fatal shot before he was entirely out into the open. This ridiculous plan somehow sold itself to me. It very nearly brought about the death of a good dog, and the finish of a man who should have known better!

The next day I heated a large horse-shoe to a malleable temperature, and hammered it into a roughly shaped hook, which I filed to a sharp point. Flattening the other end slightly, and enlarging the holes in it to allow the passage of round wire nails, I fastened it to the small end of the aspen sapling, and taking a stout rope used for tying up my bed-roll and baggage when moving, I returned to the den.

THE plan was simple—yes, very simple! I intended to hook the bear and pull him into view, shoot him, and drag him on out dead. For augmented power, I planned to tie the rope to the large end of the pole, and pass the free end one and a half turns around the little pine tree, well up toward the top, which would act as a snub, and prevent the backward movement of the bear, once I had him started forward. By pulling on both the outgoing and the incoming

We've had an unusual number of Real Experience tales dealing with bears lately—and have therefore grouped five of the best of them here. And mighty lively stories they are!



strands of the rope, from my place before the den, I could put a bow in the small pine tree, and by jerking quickly on the incoming strand at the right time, I could take up the slack as the pole brought the bear forward; the bowed tree would thus supply a strong, constant pull, which the bear would only increase upon himself by pulling backward.

But this scheme had one vital weakness that I failed to see at the time—there was no provision in it for holding the bear back, in case he should decide to come forward under his own power.

Cutting a notch in the large end of the pole to secure the rope, I pushed it into the den, and rigged the rope around the little pine as planned. Maneuvering the pole, I soon knew by the feel of things and also by the loud snarls of protest from within the den, that I had him hooked. I quickly drew the line taut; the tree bent into a bow toward me, and the operation of this interesting device was in full swing. The bear, as I afterward saw, was hooked at the angle of his jaw on the left side just under his ear, a connection that he could undo only by moving forward.

But he was pulling back, and my device was working as well as could be wished. I felt a glow of pride in the remorseless efficiency of my brilliant invention. Fearful snarls now issued from the den. But my rifle was standing against a rock within an instant's reach, and as I heaved on my pulling apparatus, I kept a sharp lookout down the hole for a glimpse of my game. Jeff was in a paroxysm of barks and growls which added to the fearful racket coming from the den, must have caused all other creatures in the district to take to their heels.

The bear was coming out, though most reluctantly; the large end of the sapling

was now back almost half its length. Peering down into the gloom I caught a dim glimpse of the bear's distorted features and reached for my gun. But—as I recall now—just as I started the movement to secure my gun, there was a sudden frightful snarl right in my very ears; I felt a shock, and remember landing on my back in the thick tangle of boughs at the base of the pine tree. Pole, rocks, bear and all had erupted from that hole as though thrown out by a volcano!

I rolled out from under the pine tree and started running, but in the knee-deep snow my progress took the form of a series of desperate dives downhill, rolling as far as possible with each dive.

I DID not look back, for I had no desire to see what must be within two feet of me. After what seemed a long-drawn race with death, but which really was a matter of moments only, I came to a frantic stand in a gully as deep as my shoulders, facing uphill toward the scene of my late ill-judged labors.

The bear, I saw, was not more than twenty feet from the opening to the den, and doing all in his power to get his paws on Jeff. But for the instant intervention of Jeff I would now have been beyond aid. I felt a wave of fear for my beloved dog, though Jeff was using excellent tactics. Dodging the bear's savage rushes, he leaped in and out

among the small trees; he would take a momentary stand, and show every indication of grappling with the bear, until the latter would rush for him—then Jeff would be elsewhere, and the snow seemed to impede the rushes of the bear more than the gyrations of the dog.

This I took in as I worked my way toward my rifle, hoping I could secure it before my dog was killed, for I knew that one swipe of those paws, landing, would mean the end of Jeff, and I would be next—unless I got the rifle in time. My gun had been knocked several feet by the bear's eruption from the den, but fortunately was not broken, and had landed where Jeff and I had trampled the snow down. Eagerly I seized the rifle and holding it at ready, I watched my chance to send in a fatal shot.

By now the bear had reached a place just in front of a small bushy pine, while Jeff was standing on a rock from which the snow had been brushed, ready to leap a good distance as soon as the bear should start another rush. The bear's left side was toward me and as he raised a front paw, I planted a bullet at the point where his left leg joined his body. He had not seen me until then, his eyes being centered on Jeff. At the impact of the bullet he whirled to face this new enemy, exposing his unprotected flank to a darting snap and tug from Jeff. The bear moved his head around to locate the dog; while his head was turned, exposing the hollow just back of his left ear, I sent another bullet into that spot—and the wildest experience I ever took part in was over.

Jeff was unhurt. The moment the bear emerged from the den, knocking me through the pine tree,—though it may have been the sudden release of the tackle that caused my backward spin,—Jeff undoubtedly had fastened his teeth into the hind leg or rump of the bear and thereafter the enraged animal was too busily engaged with the dog to worry about what had become of the real disturber of his sleep. I had many scratches from my flight through the pine tree, and a number of bruises, but none of any consequence.

THE bear was a medium-sized specimen of the brown or cinnamon variety, and while his meat was as good as that of any bear, I was sharply reminded each time I partook of it, that fishing for a hibernating bear is no venture for a prudent man.

II—The Bear in the

IHAD been knocking around the harvest-fields of Manitoba and Saskatchewan when a big snowstorm caught us and put the "kibosh" on the threshing. I started east and at a small town in Ontario, where a big lumber concern had its headquarters, I landed a job as cook with one of the pulp-cutting outfits.

We went about ninety miles up a lake in what they called an "alligator." This was a sort of steamboat having shoes on the bottom of it; when they came to a portage some of the crew would go ashore and make a piece of cable fast to a tree or stump, then by means of a winch in the fore end, the boat would lift itself out of the water and over the portage, slipping into the lake on the other side.

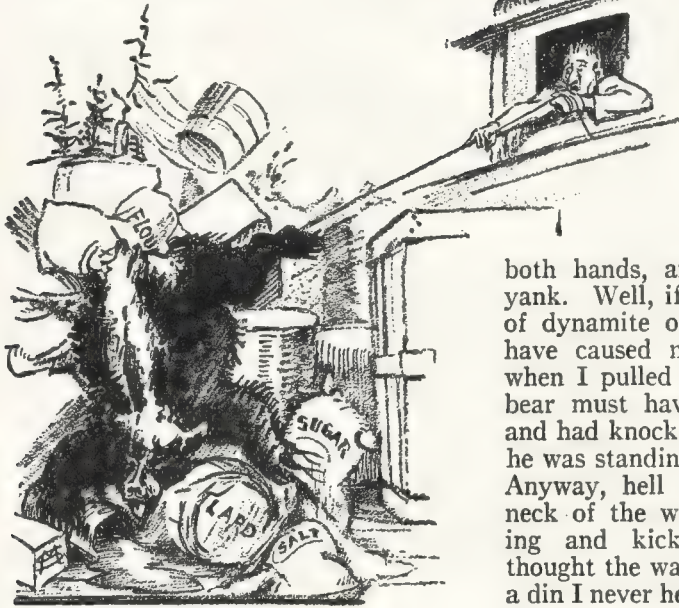
When we arrived at our destination I found it to be a portage a bit longer than they cared to cross often with the alligator. Here they would unload the scow which was towed behind, loaded with hay and grain for the horses, and all sorts of provisions for the men, piling them on the wharf to be distributed later among the camps. There was already on the wharf a mammoth pile covered with a tarpaulin. My quarters consisted of a houseboat or "wanagan," as it was called, and my duty was to feed the men brought in by the alligator until some one came down the lake in a motorboat and took them to the various camps.

Most of the time I was alone—and one wild dismal place it was too—nothing but water and woods.

One bright moonlight night I woke to hear a peculiar thumping noise out on the wharf. I was supposed to keep my eye on the goods piled up there, so I got up and went out. I couldn't see a thing, but I kept hearing that thumping noise over in back of the pile—a kind of smacking sound too, like a pig eating. I let out a couple of "whoops"—and what should rise from behind a pile of baled hay but the biggest brown bear I ever saw! My hair sure rose right along with the bear. He had a five-gallon tin of corn syrup in his arms and had hugged it to him until it had opened in the seams. It was his eating this that had made the smacking noise. Another shout caused him to drop the can, and he ambled off into the bush.

Wanagan

By
SAUL
BLANCHARD



Next morning, what I thought was a bright idea struck me: If I could only catch that bear, figuring the bounty and his hide, I'd have carfare back to the States and be sitting pretty. So I rummaged around, finding a broken length of cable they used on the alligator, and by untwisting a strand of it, I got a long, pliable yet very strong piece of wire. Then I rolled a couple of bales of hay up against the pile of provisions on each side of the broken syrup-tin, and put another on top. That made a box-like cavity, with the syrup-tin, and such of its contents as had run out on the wharf, in the middle, leaving one end open. Next I made a noose on one end of the wire, managing to fasten it over the opening. The other end I made fast to the wanagan on an iron cleat which was used to fasten boom chains when they were towing rafts of logs. This cleat was near a sliding window that was used when we wanted to dip water out of the lake. Now my trap was all set!

I sat up late that night, but no bear put in an appearance; the next night was the same. So I concluded he had forgotten all about it and on the third night I went to bed as usual. I had been asleep some little time when I was awakened by the wire rasping on the cleat under the window. Leaping from my bunk, I leaned out the window, took the wire in

both hands, and gave it a good hard yank. Well, if I had touched off a box of dynamite on that wharf, I couldn't have caused much more damage than when I pulled that wire! It seems the bear must have been there some time and had knocked the noose down so that he was standing with one hind foot in it. Anyway, hell sure broke loose in that neck of the woods! He started jumping and kicking. At every jump I thought the wanagan would upset. Such a din I never heard; every pot and pan in the place came crashing down from where they hung on the wall. Then he started raising havoc with the goods on the wharf—bursting open sugar- and flour-bags, cheese encased in wooden hoops, and everything else that was handy to his reach. At last he fell off into the lake and I thought he was going to climb aboard the wanagan.

What interested me most just then was not catching bears, but how to get rid of the one I had. The old wanagan was rocking like a ship at sea and the bear was splashing around in the lake trying to get back upon the wharf. I dashed out, grabbed the ax and tried to cut the wire. But every time I would hit at the wire the bear would give it a yank and I'd wallop the boat. At last I made connections and wire and wanagan parted company. The bear tore off through the brush, wire and all; but he was no more glad to go than I was to have him leave. It took me the rest of the night to tidy up the kitchen, and all the next forenoon to repair the damage to the wharf.

When the alligator arrived that afternoon without any men for me to feed, I decided it was a good time for me to be going out. I went down with them that night, keeping my method of trapping bear wholly to myself. And my advice to anyone planning to choke a bear to death is: be mighty particular which end of him you put the noose on!

III—Over the Precipice

By LANS LANEVE



IT was while I was engaged by the Oregon State Game Commission that this adventure befell me.

My occupation was to trap and hunt predatory animals—mountain-lions, bobcats and coyotes.

One bright October morning found me leaving a temporary camp on the headwaters of a river in southwestern Oregon, miles from human habitation. Day was just breaking and a light frost covered the ground, making ideal tracking weather for my hounds, Drum and old Cap.

I had camped at the base of a big cliff the evening before and had decided to work my way to the top of it in order to gain the big-timber country to the west.

It took me a solid hour to work my way up the steep face of the cliff but at last I gained the top, only to be confronted by a second towering wall of rock. It was impossible to work my way up this second wall and as a narrow trail wound about the top of the wall upon which I now stood, I decided to follow it. For a quarter of a mile I wound about on this trail; it became narrower at each turn, while the chasm beneath me

grew deeper as the trail wound higher and higher up the face of the cliff.

The dogs had just disappeared around a sharp turn ahead, when sounds of combat reached me. There were sharp startled barks, deep-throated growls and the sound of gnashing teeth. Even before I rounded the turn I knew the scene that would confront me.

The narrow trail led straight into a dark cave and at its entrance stood a huge bear. He was reared upon his hind feet, striking with long-clawed paws at the two dogs crowding him close.

How well I knew what one rake of those deadly claws would do to a dog! Perhaps I was foolhardy—but the lives of my dogs were at stake. I had drawn my revolver, a .38, as I rounded the curve in the trail and taking hasty aim I fired at the bear's breast, at a distance of some twenty feet. With a roar he launched himself forward, knocking both dogs over, and charged directly at me.

It is seldom that a black bear will attack a man—never unless wounded or unless its small cubs are disturbed. I will never know whether the bear, angered by the pain of the wound, charged me vengefully, or was trying to escape.

The trail was very narrow, and a thousand feet below me lay a boulder-strewn cañon, while the steep walls of the cliff along which the trail wound were insurmountable. There was only one thing to do: Aiming at the oncoming bear, I pulled the trigger as fast as I could work my finger, and at that short range every bullet took effect. A dull click told me the gun was empty—there was no time to reload.

I whirled to run, slipped upon a loose stone, and the bear crashed into me, sending me sprawling over the brink. I was aware of a huge black body shooting past me as I fell through space.

I shall never forget the horror of those few seconds before I crashed into the top of a bush growing upon the cliff's side. Frantically I clutched it, praying that the roots would hold. And they did. With the cold sweat standing out upon my brow, and shaking until my teeth

chattered, I finally secured a foothold upon a narrow ledge beneath the bush, and took stock of the situation. I had fallen a distance of some fifty feet. Above as well as below me the cliff was almost perpendicular. Far below, I could see a dark object lying upon the cañon's floor which I was positive was all that remained of the bear. From above me my dogs were gazing down, and if it had not been for my perilous position I should have had to laugh at the look of consternation upon their faces. Old Cap whined and the whine was echoed by Drum. Then Cap barked loudly and the youngster followed suit.

It looked as though my life had been saved for the time being, but surely death was staring me in the face—death by thirst and starvation. The voices of the dogs, raised in an incessant barking, got on my nerves. I was about to shout for them to stop when it occurred to me that the only chance for my rescue—and that a slim one—lay in the possibility that some wandering prospector or hunter might hear them and come to investigate.

The day wore on, the sun mounting higher and higher. My thirst was growing unbearable, and every bone in my

body ached. Finally the long shadows of evening began to fall about me and a chill crept into the air. I knew I would suffer from the cold far more than I had during the day from the heat. By this time I was almost exhausted; but I dared not sleep for fear I would lose my footing and plunge into the cañon.

Suddenly the tones of the dogs' voices changed from that long-drawn treeing bark to sharp yelps of delight; then their faces appeared above me, and an instant later a man's face loomed between them. It was but the work of a few moments to lower a rope; after I secured it about my waist, I was hoisted to the brink.

It developed that the man—Dave Long, a trapper—was exploring that part of the country looking for trapping territory for the coming winter when his attention had been attracted by the baying hounds. Thinking that they had some "varmint" treed, he had spent almost five hours in working his way up to them by the aid of a rope.

This adventure happened me some six years ago, but even now I sometimes awaken with a cry of horror on my lips, as in my dreams I again go hurtling over the brink of the cliff.

IV—Hand to Claw

By ROBERT W. BECK

AFTER a year of trapping around Hudson Bay, I decided to thaw out for awhile. So I mushed south, sold my team, and fell into a job as trapper for the Purdy Ranch—just a hundred miles south of Lake Superior!

A queer place for a ranch, I thought at first. Yet it was easily explained. In that country there are thousands of acres of cut-over, burned-over land, covered now by a sparse growth of jack-pine. The land was considered worthless until Ben Purdy, who owned a good-sized chunk of it, got the idea of running a ranch. He shipped in a couple of thousand head of cattle and imported some cow-hands from the West. Things went pretty smoothly, except that the country proved to be thick with wolves. Soon it was clear that the wolves would have to be exterminated. I happened



along shortly after this conclusion had been reached, and after admitting that I'd done some trapping, I was given the job.

For three days I covered the range without seeing any beast large enough to

bother a sick calf—and the cow-hands razzed me mercilessly. One afternoon, after the day had passed without my seeing a living thing except my own horse, the grass in front of me stirred and a pair of scared rabbits raced across my path. Willing to accept any opportunity for diversion that presented itself, I raised my revolver and took a pot-shot at the nearest one. The shot was almost drowned out by a roaring laugh that came from behind me. I turned. There was Shorty Wilson, one of the cowboys, reeling in his saddle, holding his sides.

"Too bad," he murmured sympathetically after he'd finally found his breath. "Tough luck for the Purdy Ranch that you didn't nail 'em! Them rabbits have been raisin' an awful row with the cows lately."

With that he exploded again, turned his horse around and rode for the ranch.

THAT night at supper-time some one across the table said gravely in a Western drawl:

"Tell me, Trapper, did the critter bare his fangs when you had him at bay?"

The rest of them roared with laughter. All I could do was grin and take it. It might have kept on all night if the door hadn't suddenly opened and a voice shouted:

"Bears in the north woods! Get your guns, boys!"

With a yell, the whole bunch flung back their chairs, grabbed their guns and rushed out toward the corral. I was with them going out the door, but lost several seconds in finding my horse. By the time I was mounted, the boys had all disappeared in the brush, leaving only a cloud of dust to point the way for me. I dug the spurs in as much as I dared and followed.

But apparently bear-hunts were no inspiration to my mount, for before long we were so far behind that I couldn't hear a sound from the bear-hunters. After a few moments during which I spurred him severely, I gave it up and let him coast to a halt. Immediately he bent his head and began to eat grass.

Feeling pretty low, I sat there for some time looking down along the neck of the horse. Then the brush in front of me rustled. I looked up. Facing me, with a surprised look on his face, was a huge bear. I tumbled from the saddle completely, but managed to keep on my feet as I hit the ground. Grab-

bing my revolver, I aimed quickly at his head, and fired twice.

With a shrieking howl, the big bear snapped his head to one side—then started lumbering toward me! I let him have two more. He stopped as though he had run into a wall, and another piercing howl nearly deafened me. I aimed again at the head, and fired—my fifth bullet. The great bear quivered a moment, then seemed to fold up. I edged closer, found a spot where I thought my last bullet would be most effective, and pulled the trigger.

Click! Like a shock, I recalled that I had fired that last cartridge at a rabbit that afternoon! The shot I now needed to kill a bear, I had carelessly fired at a passing bunny! And there before my eyes the bear was staggering to its feet.

My hand brushed against my belt. There was the handle of my hunting-knife—the only other weapon I had. Grabbing the knife out of its sheath, I stepped forward.

The bear reared back on its haunches, his little eyes on fire. Crazy-mad, I rushed in, my knife back; up went a big hairy paw at the same time. I plunged my knife deep in his shoulder, and just as I did so, his arm came down with the force of a pile-driver. I landed twenty feet away, struck numb by a blow that had almost knocked my jaw loose. My body ached and tingled all over, but slowly my head began to clear. I was sitting down, still facing the bear. And as I was wildly wondering what to do when he came at me again, I saw the big hulk give a last feeble gasp and crumple into a lifeless heap of fur.

BACK at the ranch a few minutes later, we were again at our supper. The food was stone-cold, but it tasted better than anything I had ever eaten. As before, I was the center of attention, and my name the chief subject of conversation. But what a difference! As I chewed on a piece of cold beef, I heard Shorty Wilson tell it again:

"And when we heard all that shootin' we rode over to see what was up. And there was Trapper, sitting in the grass with a knife in one hand, and a gun in the other. We asked him a heap of questions, but he wouldn't talk. Then we saw the reason. Boys, he couldn't say a word, on account his mouth was plumb full of bear's hair!"

V—This Bear Got Mad

By
C. MCIVOR
DOERING

MID-OCTOBER of 1918 found me in a northern Wisconsin pulp-wood camp. I had finished high school the summer before, and when this pulp-camp job offered itself, I took it, eager for possible adventure.

The adventure, I found, was slow in materializing. Game was plentiful and varied about the camp, but the foreman saw to it that my time was occupied.

He and I had gone to the camp as an advance-guard, to get the place in readiness for the main crew, which was to follow in two weeks. The buildings were of pole-and-tar-paper construction, and there was much work to be done on them: there were roofs to be patched, walls to be re-chinked and bunks to be re-bedded. This was tedious work, especially to a boy of seventeen who was looking for excitement.

The elderly foreman, Matt McKenna by name, was interesting company; he had a large fund of experience to draw from, and droll humor and philosophy to mix with it. However, he was given to spells of moodiness, and he had a capacity for handing out work, rather than for work itself.

The fourth day we were on the job word was brought in that some of the camp supplies had been dumped off at the main road, where the camp trail joined it, about a quarter-mile distant from the buildings. Matt told me at noon that we would have to tote the stuff in. He went on to explain that the stuff consisted of horse-feed and supplies for the camp kitchen. His suggestion was that as oats was lighter and easier to pack than sacked flour and sugar, I should hold myself responsible for bringing in that part of the supplies, and I agreed gratefully.

I soon found that I had made a mistake. There were twenty sacks of oats for my share, while the remainder consisted of a sack each of flour and sugar, a case of canned milk, and a small tub



of shortening. However, I carried out my part of the bargain.

It was sunset when I finished, and I was about exhausted. McKenna was sitting on the step of the cook-shack with a cold pipe between his teeth. He complained that he had snagged the sack of sugar somewhere along the way to camp and that considerable of it had been lost. As a patriotic citizen he deplored the loss, for this was in the days of wartime sugar conservation.

After our evening meal McKenna announced he was going to a near-by village. When he had gone I built up a good fire in the big range—we were using the cook's regular quarters for the sake of convenience—and enjoyed a rest. There was a touch of frost in the evening air, and it was good just to sit and listen to the crackle and sputter of the fire.

Soon though it was still early, I decided to turn in for the night. Out of consideration for Matt, I chose the upper of the two bunks.

I had slept a couple of hours when I became conscious that some one was in the room with me. Hazily I recalled that McKenna had gone to the village earlier in the evening. Evidently he had returned drunk. In a few seconds more of increasing wakefulness I felt I understood the situation. Matt was groping about on hands and knees; what was more, he was on a crying jag. That was the only possible explanation for his constant sniffing.

My reaction was angry disgust; so long as he kept up this groping about, sleep was impossible.

"Say, get it over with!" I growled

down. "Light the lantern or something!"

Evidently, he took offense at this, for he didn't answer. However, the floor creaked heavily, as though he was getting to his feet. I felt my bunk give slightly, at the foot, as he rested his weight on it for support.

The darkness of the room was impenetrable. Strain as I would, I could not so much as distinguish an outline. The sniffing continued at the foot of my bunk. This business was getting on my nerves!

AT length I decided to do something to get the fellow to bed, if possible. Pushing my blankets aside with my left hand, I reached forward with my right.

But it was no woodsman's Mackinaw coat that my hand came in contact with—it was fur, something that started away from my touch. The realization came: *that wasn't Matt!* In the recoil of that knowledge I did the craziest thing I could have done: I grasped one of my heavy boots from where I had placed it between me and the wall, and swung hard.

There followed the flat impact of a boot-heel on thinly covered bone, a startled, sharp exhalation; then something flicked the blanket below my up-drawn knees, and my bunk collapsed, as though borne down by the blow of a pile-driver. I was spilled out onto the floor.

The impact of the fall jarred me wide awake. At my back was the base of the bunks; before, and arching over me, was a large menacing shape. I dived forward, and got my feet under me.

The door stood partly open, and without delay I made my exit. When I was about twenty feet from the cabin my pursuer apparently ran directly into the door, slamming it shut. Plainly, this was unlooked-for; it brought forth a snarl, and then a hurricane of activity within the building.

Sounds behind me indicated that the flimsy pine door of the cook-house was giving way to an onslaught from within. I reached the camp stable about the time the door finally gave; impressed with the worthlessness of doors as protection against whatever was back there, I decided to mount the roof. Grasping the eave of the stable lean-to, I clawed my way up.

I had made enough noise in my progress up the roof to give my pursuer his

cue. He was coming directly and purposefully. The light out of doors was considerably better than it had been within the cabin, and the outline of the animal approaching the stable was unmistakable. It was a bear!

I remembered that Northern bears are climbers; however, while this bear did thoroughly smell the walls of the building, he didn't come up. Possibly he couldn't get past the overhang of the roof. He sniffed and growled angrily as he circled the building. Then he retreated a little way up the path back to the cook-house, possibly for the purpose of seeing me. After a period of waiting at his point of vantage, he returned to the stable and went through his sniffing and circling performance again, then withdrew.

It appeared I was safe. But I wasn't comfortable; I had on a single thickness of clothes, and the night air was icy. There was a slight coating of white frost on the roof; one of my toes was smarting severely, where I had torn the nail from it in climbing on the roof. I reflected ruefully that here was some of the adventure I had been hoping for!

Finally, the bear circled the stable a little wider than he had done before. His course took him to the trail leading to the main road. Here he stopped abruptly, and gave a grunt that had a new note in it. Then he followed the trail back to the camp buildings. His actions there were ominously audible to me.

Memory of the sugar Matt had reported losing came to my mind. That, then, had been the purpose of the bear's visit. What of Matt? Had the bear met him on the trail and killed him? I pondered this for some time. The sounds at the cook-house died down, and I began considering the advisability of coming off the roof. The possibility that the bear might be lurking down below restrained me. I was still debating the question when Matt came.

IT was now nearly two o'clock. We found the cook's quarters and the kitchen in ruins. The bear had followed the scent of the spilled sugar, and had partaken of it; however, for good measure he had ripped open the sack of flour, scattered the case of canned milk, and smashed in the head of the shortening-tub. It was a thorough mess. We transferred our bedding to one of the bunk-houses for the rest of that night; we were taking no chance on a second visit!

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